

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

JUNE 1979

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TWICE AS DEADLY...

the New Mike Shayne

Short Novel

by BRETT
HALLIDAY

A DRINK BEFORE DYING

A New Major
Lansing Novelet
by WILLIAM L.
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VOL. 43, NO. 6

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TWICE AS DEADLY

by BRETT HALLIDAY

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Twice As Deadly



by **BRETT HALLIDAY**

Jill Whittington Was a Fine Young Woman — when She Wasn't Being Annie. Annie was a Real Broad. Millions of Dollars and Mike Shayne's Life Hang in the Balance while the Redhead Seeks to Learn Which is Which.

THE LION'S-HEAD knocker seemed to be growling at Mike Shayne. The big redhead glared back at it, then slapped it down on

the plate set in the middle of the heavy wooden door. He studied the ornate scrollwork of the door distractedly as he waited for an an-

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swer to his summons.

The door swung open a few inches and a dignified face peered out at Shayne. The man's demeanor and quiet gray suit branded him a butler. He took in Shayne's rangy form and asked, "Yes? May I help you?"

"I'm Mike Shayne. Mr. Jenkins wanted to see me."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Shayne! I should have recognized you. Come in, please. Mr. Jenkins is in the study."

Shayne stepped into the foyer of the luxurious Miami mansion and followed the butler down a hall lined with paintings. Delicate statuettes sat on pedestals, and Shayne felt a little like the proverbial bull in the china shop. His big rough exterior was in sharp contrast to the surroundings.

The butler opened another door and stepped aside for Shayne to enter.

Shayne walked inside the richly furnished study and cast his gray eyes around. Full bookshelves lined the walls. The carpet was lush and thick underfoot, and a big bay window looked out on a garden. A mahogany desk was in front of the window, and at the desk sat a middle-aged man studying some papers in a cardboard folder.

The man looked up as Shayne came in, then put the folder down and rose. He extended a hand,

said, "I'm Arthur Jenkins. Glad you could make it, Mr. Shayne. I've heard a lot about you."

Shayne returned the handshake briefly, said hello.

"Is all of it true?"

"Tim Rourke and his fellow newshounds exaggerate sometimes. What can I do for you?"

Jenkins waved the redhead into a chair, asked a question of his own. "Would you like a drink?" At Shayne's nod, he went to a small bar on one wall and got glasses and a bottle.

Shayne sampled the drink Jenkins handed him and looked up approvingly as he recognized the mellow flavor of Martell. Jenkins sipped his own drink, sat down behind the desk again before he spoke.

"Mr. Shayne, in case you didn't know, this house belonged to Grant Whittington before his death. I'm the attorney for the estate."

Shayne frowned slightly. He had thought the place looked familiar. He remembered it from newspaper stories about Whittington.

"You *are* familiar with Mr. Whittington, aren't you?" Jenkins added.

"I know who he was — millionaire industrialist from up north. He came to Florida because he was getting old and the cold winters were starting to get to him. He died a couple of years ago, right?"

"Nearly three years ago. He

left an estate valued at quite a few millions."

"What's that got to do with me? You didn't seem to want to talk too much on the phone."

Jenkins sighed and turned a gilt-framed picture on the desk so that Shayne could see it. "This is Mr. Whittington's daughter Jill. She's the reason I called you."

The photograph showed a very pretty blonde in her late teens or early twenties. Shayne looked at it and waited for Jenkins to continue.

"Jill is an only child, Mr. Shayne, and since Mr. Whittington's wife died years ago, he left his entire estate to her. It's in the form of a trust fund right now."

"Jill doesn't have control of the trust?"

"No. I was Mr. Whittington's attorney at the time of his death, and he put me in charge."

Shayne leaned back, propped his right ankle on his left knee and guessed shrewdly, "And now Jill's about to take control of it, right?"

"That's correct. Mr. Whittington's will specified that the trust be turned over to her on her twenty-first birthday. That's next week."

Shayne tugged at his left earlobe. "What is it you want me to do?"

"To be honest, Mr. Shayne, I'm worried about Jill. She's always been a very responsible, level-headed young lady, but in the last

few months, she seems to have . . . changed."

"In what way?"

"She used to be a quiet girl. Sometimes she still is. But at other times, she's gotten . . . I don't know . . . wild, I suppose. In dress and actions both. She's started drinking and going to night clubs."

"How *horrible!*" Shayne said, sarcasm dripping in his tone.

"I know that doesn't sound so bad, Mr. Shayne, but it's way out of character for Jill. Some of her new friends are . . . well, unsavory, too. But that's not what worries me the most."

Shayne felt his impatience growing inside him. "How about something more explicit?" he said.

"Several times I've tried to speak to Jill when she seems over-excited, tried to find out what was the matter. Her reaction has been . . . well, violent. She claims there's nothing wrong with her, yet sometimes she doesn't even know who she is."

"She calls herself Annie when she's in that condition. She's tried to slap me several times. Once she said if I didn't leave her alone, she'd kill me!"

Jenkins' face had taken on a haggard look as he talked. It was evident to Shayne that the man was under heavy strain. The big redhead ran a thumbnail along his jaw, said, "It sounds as if you need help, all right, Jenkins. But

you need a shrink, not a shamus. What help could I be?"

"I've been trying to get Jill to see a psychiatrist, but she won't hear of it. Mr. Shayne, she doesn't even remember the times when she calls herself Annie. It's as if she's blacked out. As long as she's like this, I can't in good conscience turn the Whittington fortune over to her. Yet, legally, I'll have to next week."

Shayne stood up. "I think I see what you're driving at. You want me to ride herd on the girl and keep her out of trouble until you can convince her she needs help."

Jenkins nodded.

Shayne shook his red head. "You've got the wrong man for the job. It's babysitting, and I don't take cases like that. I can steer you to some reputable agencies, though."

Jenkins looked distressed. "I wish you'd reconsider. You've got a reputation as the best detective in Miami. I really think Jill needs protection, both from herself and from the people she's associating with."

Shayne looked thoughtful for a moment, then said, "I see your point. A wild kid coming into a lot of money offers a tempting mark. But it just doesn't feel right to me. You'd better get somebody else."

He was turning to leave when the study door opened. A girl that had to be Jill Whittington stood there and said, "Oh, I didn't know

you were busy, Uncle Arthur. I'll come back later."

Jenkins stood up hurriedly and said, "No, that's all right. Come in, Jill."

Shayne looked at the girl and liked what he saw. Her trim athletic body was shown off by blue jeans and a jersey pullover. Honey-colored hair fell to her shoulders. Her clear blue eyes looked steadily into his as she said, "Hello. I'm Jill Whittington."

Shayne nodded, said, "Hi."

"This is Mr. Shayne," Jenkins said. "We are just discussing some business."

"Mike Shayne?" the girl said. "Gee, I've seen your picture in the paper I don't know how many times. I hope I'm not interrupting anything."

"No," Shayne said. "In fact, I was just leaving."

"It's really great to meet you. You're pretty famous, you know."

Shayne had to grin at Jill's open admiration. "A lot of people in this town would say infamous. You can't believe everything you read in the paper."

"I believe what Tim Rourke writes. I'm a journalism student at the university, and I guess you could say Mr. Rourke is my hero."

Wait until Tim heard that! He was a connoisseur of beautiful young women, but not many of them admired him for his journalistic abilities. On the other hand, Shayne considered, it might be

better not to tell him. His old journalist friend was prone to balloon-headedness at times.

"Tim has been known to embellish things," he said. "It was nice to meet you, Miss Whittington. Jenkins, could I talk to you for a minute before I go?"

"Of course," the lawyer replied.

The two men walked out of the study and back toward the front door. Shayne said quietly, "She seems like a nice kid. It's hard to believe she's got a violent split personality."

"I know. That's what makes it so damned disturbing."

Creases appeared in Shayne's craggy brow. His years as a detective had made him a good judge of character, and Jill Whittington had impressed him favorably.

He said, "Tell you what, Jenkins — it still doesn't feel like my kind of case, but I'll give it a shot for a day or two. I've got a few things to do this afternoon, but I'll start keeping tabs on her tonight."

Jenkins looked relieved. "You don't know how glad I am to hear that, Mr. Shayne. I'm sure Jill will be safe with you looking after her."

"Don't tell her about it — all right? It'll be easier to keep an eye on her if she doesn't know anything about it."

"Of course. I thought the same thing. If she asks, I'll tell her you were here on another matter en-

tirely. Now, I suppose I need to give you a check."

"Later," Shayne said. "My secretary's out of town, but I'll mail you a contract. You can send me a check then."

Jenkins thanked him again and gave him a card with phone numbers where he could be reached, then let him out. Shayne's Buick was parked in the drive. The red-headed detective paused to light a cigarette before he got into the car.

It was a warm, pleasant day in Miami, and Shayne should have felt good as he let the smoke trickle from his nostrils. But, somehow, he didn't feel good at all.

II

ON HIS WAY back to the office on Flagler Street, Mike Shayne went over in his own mind the reasons for his acceptance of the assignment.

Like when he had told the lawyer that his secretary was out of town. Lucy Hamilton was far more than a secretary to Shayne. She was attending the wedding of an old friend in Texas and, until she returned, Shayne knew he would be just a little bit bored. A case would keep him occupied.

Then, he had taken an instant liking to Jill Whittington. If what Jenkins said was true, she could easily wind up in a lot of trouble. He wanted to prevent that if he could.

The office seemed drab and empty without Lucy's presence to brighten it. Shayne tossed his hat on the rack as he came in, then went on into his inner office. After pouring himself a drink from the bottle in the filing cabinet, he lit another cigarette and pulled the telephone over in front of him.

Tim Rourke was at his desk at the Miami *Daily News*. Shayne exchanged greetings with the bony reporter and then said into the phone, "Let me throw three names at you, Tim, and you tell me if they mean anything to you."

"Okay, Mike. Shoot."

"Grant Whittington, Jill Whittington and Arthur Jenkins."

There was a long moment's silence as Rourke shuffled through his voluminous mental files. Then he said, "Whittington has been dead for a couple of years, of course, but he was a millionaire from out of state, came here for his health. Jill is his daughter, and Jenkins — I think but I'm not sure — is the family lawyer. How's that?"

"Three for three as far as it goes. What can you tell me about Jill?"

"She inherited her old man's estate, but she's always kept a pretty low profile. Until lately, anyway."

The redhead took a deep drag on his smoke and said, "What's that mean?"

"It means she's been a little on

the wild side in recent weeks. She's been seen hanging around with some pretty rough boys, getting drunk in clubs, things like that."

"Who are some of these rough boys she's been seeing?"

"Word has it that Vince Taliaferro has taken a shine to her."

The hollows in Shayne's cheeks got deeper, and his left hand went unconsciously to his earlobe. Taliaferro was a rapidly rising figure in Miami's underworld, and there was no way he could visualize Jill Whittington with him. He stubbed out the cigarette.

"How about Jenkins, Tim? You know anything about him?"

"Just that he's an attorney and that he handles the Whittington estate. What's it all about, Mike? You on a case involving these people?"

Shayne considered for a moment, then said, "Yeah, but there's no story in it for you, Tim. Not yet anyway. Jenkins is afraid that Jill has developed a split personality, and he wants me to ride herd on her until he gets her some professional help."

Rourke laughed harshly. "No story, huh? Mike Shayne playing nursemaid to a beautiful young heiress. What do you call that?"

"I call it good reason to keep your mouth shut," Shayne snapped. "Printing that wouldn't do anything but hurt people, and that's not your style."

"Hey, take it easy, Mike! I

was just kidding. I won't ruin your image."

"My image isn't what I'm worried about."

Rourke changed the subject by asking, "Say, when's Lucy supposed to be back?"

"I'm not sure — in a few days. She was going to visit some other friends while she was gone."

"When you get this case wrapped up, what do you say we go out on the town like we did in the bad old days?"

Shayne had to smile. "Sometimes the bad old days weren't all that good. But the idea sounds fine. See you later, Tim."

The newsman bid him goodbye, and Shayne hung up. There was one more phone call he wanted to make, but he had to get out his notebook to look up the number.

When he had found what he was after, he dialled and told the receptionist who answered, "I'd like to speak to Dr. Spencer, please. Mike Shayne calling."

Dr. Leland Spencer was a practicing psychologist Shayne had met through their mutual interest in crime and criminals. The redhead had had several interesting talks with him, although their views sometimes differed widely.

Spencer came on the line and said, "Mike! Good to hear from you. How are you?"

"Just fine, Lee. I've got a couple of questions I need to ask you."

"Glad to answer, if I can."

"Is it possible for a person to have another personality that's radically different from his usual one?"

"Definitely — and sometimes more than one. There are case histories full of multiple personalities."

Shayne was still worrying at his left earlobe. "And the person might not remember what he did in the other personality?"

"Right. Sometimes they do, but most of the time they don't. What they *do* remember would be jumbled and confused."

"Okay, Lee. Thanks."

"Any time."

Shayne hung up and sat back in his chair. There was still an uneasy feeling in his head, but he was increasingly glad that he had taken the case. A girl as pretty and as rich as Jill needed to know what she was doing at all times. If she didn't, then she needed a big redheaded shamus around to bail her out of trouble.

III

THREE HOURS later, Shayne was sitting in his Buick, parked just down the street from the Whittington mansion. He had checked with Arthur Jenkins by phone earlier, and the lawyer had told him that Jill was still at the house. Shayne was ready when and if she left.

He had dined well at The Beef House, then come straight here. He fired up a smoke and sat back to wait comfortably.

Thirty minutes passed, during which the sun went down in a golden glow. Twilight was just settling in when a sporty yellow car came down the driveway of the Whittington estate. Shayne knew from his earlier conversation with Jenkins that Jill drove a yellow MG.

The Buick's engine purred into life under Shayne's touch. He watched as the MG turned out onto the street faster than it really should have. He caught a glimpse of the driver's blonde hair in the dim light.

Jill drove fast and a little recklessly, but it was no trick for Shayne to follow her. He had trailed some of the best wheelmen successfully. A twenty-year-old girl wasn't about to shake him.

She headed straight for Miami Beach. Shayne followed her across and was three cars behind her as she pulled into the parking garage of a beachfront hotel.

He went in after her and turned his car over to an attendant. As he got out, his eyes picked out Jill's fair head entering one of a bank of elevators on the wall. The door slid shut behind her. Shayne trotted over to catch another.

The elevators went up side by side, stopping at nearly every floor. Shayne stuck his head out

at every stop just long enough to make sure that Jill hadn't disembarked. The cars kept going up.

Shayne quirked an eyebrow as the floor indicator continued to climb. It looked as if the girl were headed for the very top, and the big detective suddenly remembered all the publicity about the opening of a new penthouse disco — right here in this hotel.

When the elevator had gone as high as it could and the door slid open, Shayne hesitated for an instant before stepping out into bedlam. Then the surge of other passengers behind him forced him to move out.

Loud music assaulted the ears, flashing lights assailed his eyes. The overall lighting was poor, but Shayne could see Jill Whittington moving across the crowded floor. She was wearing a bright off-the-shoulder print dress that didn't seem to match the girl he had met earlier in the day. She was laughing and calling out to people she recognized.

A dance floor took up most of the space in the room, with tables scattered around the edges and a bar along one wall. The other three walls were plate glass, revealing a dazzling panorama with the lights of Miami on one side and an endless expanse of Atlantic Ocean on the other.

Shayne followed Jill, staying close but not *too* close, trying to keep out of her view. As he

watched, she waved at a group of people sitting around a table and headed in that direction.

Shayne heard calls of, "*Hi, Annie!*" as she approached. One of the men stood up and held out his arms. Jill went into them and tilted her head up to receive a long hungry kiss. Shayne could feel his guts tightening.

The dark man who was kissing Jill was Vince Taliaferro. The other men around the table were soldiers in the same organization.

Shayne grabbed a just-vacated stool at the bar and ordered cognac from the long-haired young bartender. When the drink came, he sampled it, grimaced at the inferiority of the product.

Jill's back was to him, which was as he wanted it, but he could plainly see that, in the course of the next half hour, she knocked back an amazing number of drinks. She was sitting practically in Taliaferro's lap, and her harsh brittle laughter reached Shayne even over the din of the music.

He drank the bad cognac slowly and watched the girl. Sometimes, the ebb and flow of the dancers blocked Shayne's vision, but only for brief seconds. Jill seemed to be good and drunk now, and Shayne was growing more disgusted by the minute.

A heavy hand fell on his shoulder. "*Hello, Shayne!*" a deep voice boomed.

The redhead turned to see a man built along the general lines

of a gorilla, said, "Hello, Manny. What brings you out from under your rock?"

Manny March chuckled and said, "Still the same arrogant bastard, ain't you, Shayne? It's been a while since we butted heads. I thought maybe we could be friends now."

"I don't think so."

"Aw, come on, Shayne. I can only hate one guy at a time, and right now all my mad is aimed at Vince Taliaferro."

Shayne studied Manny thoughtfully out of the corner of an eye. March had never been more than a minor hoodlum, specializing in protection rackets. If he had a beef going now with Taliaferro, that was interesting, especially considering Taliaferro's present companion.

"I didn't know you'd had a run-in with Taliaferro," he said carefully.

"Yeah, he tried to muscle in on one of my rackets a couple of months back. I wanted to slap him down good, but the big boys wouldn't let me. Seems like Vince is one of their pets right now."

Shayne could sense the anger that was smoldering inside Manny March. It made him more than a little uneasy. A feud between the two mobsters would make Jill's situation even more precarious. He could see why Arthur Jenkins was worried about the company she was keeping.

Shayne downed the rest of his drink and said conversationally,

"Sorry you've been having troubles, Manny."

March tossed off a slug of whiskey, then grated, "Save your sympathy for Taliaferro, Shayne. He's the one who's gonna need it. See ya around." The chunky mobster moved off through the crowd.

Shayne shook his head when the bartender asked him if he wanted a refill. He was hoping that Jill would be leaving soon. The flashing lights and blaring music were getting on his nerves.

But the girl showed no signs of imminent departure. She was dancing with Taliaferro now, whirling and laughing as she moved around the dance floor. Shayne could see the bright, almost artificial animation on her face.

It went on for another hour, Shayne sitting at the bar and nursing his drink while Jill danced wildly and poured liquor down her throat. The big detective kept an eye open for Manny March but didn't see him again.

Finally, Taliaferro, with an arm around Jill, motioned to the rest of his party. They got up to leave. Shayne dropped money on the bar to pay for his drinks, then drifted after them, again taking a different elevator down to the garage.

He hung back inconspicuously while the group piled into a pair of big Lincoln Continentals, then reclaimed his Buick as they were

leaving. He made it onto the street in time to see the other cars making a right turn at a light.

They weren't hard to follow. Shayne had halfway expected them to try to shake any possible pursuit, but they seemed to be going in a straight line for somewhere.

The somewhere turned out to be an expensive-looking rambling house near the beach. Palm trees surrounded the building, along with heavy shrubbery. The two Lincolns turned into the driveway. Shayne cruised on past.

He parked a couple of hundred yards down the street and started to get out of the car. He would go back on foot and slip into the grounds. It wasn't a prospect he relished. If this were Vince Taliaferro's home, as he suspected, then security would be good. He had promised to keep an eye on Jill Whittington, though.

Shayne had taken three steps toward the house when three more cars suddenly appeared and turned in at the driveway. They appeared to be full of men. Some instinct made Shayne's pulse start kicking faster.

Instants later, a fusillade of gunshots told him he was right.

Shayne's hand went inside his coat and plucked his gun from its holster as his legs picked up speed. Moving like an all-pro defensive end, he charged down the street.

He stopped just before he got

to the driveway and crouched behind a bush, peering around it to get the lay of the land. The tableau spread out before him was a grim one.

Guns were popping rapidly, interspersed with women's screams. It was obvious that the newcomers had caught Taliaferro and his men before they could get in the house. Both groups were crouched behind their respective cars, trading shots.

Shayne recognized Manny March's bulky figure among the attackers. He wasn't surprised, after the way the hoodlum had been talking earlier. He just hadn't expected it so soon.

The redhead had no desire to mix in a gangland quarrel. But there was a good chance that Jill Whittington was pinned down behind one of those cars. He had to do what he could to get her out.

Taliferro's men were outgunned and in a bad position, but Shayne could catch March in a crossfire. He picked out a target and began triggering shots.

Shayne's bullets dropped several of March's men. The others spun around, seeking the source of this new fire. Shayne ducked back as slugs clipped through the shrubbery.

He could hear Manny March roaring his anger. Taliaferro's men, their spirits buoyed by the unexpected help, increased their barrage. Shayne jumped from

place to place, harrying March's men and avoiding their return fire.

After a few minutes of battle, Shayne heard March bellow, "Let's get outta here!" There was the sound of doors slamming, then the cars came screeching back out onto the street. Shayne moved back into the shadow of a palm tree and watched the taillights fishtail away.

Now he had to find out if Jill Whittington had been hurt, and the only way to do that was to move right in. That might blow his cover with her, but it couldn't be helped.

He holstered his gun and walked out into the driveway, making sure his hands were in plain sight. He didn't want any trigger-happy gunman throwing down on him.

Taliferro and his men were picking themselves up. Shayne saw two bodies sprawled unmoving on the ground. Several of the women were crying.

One of the men saw the big redhead coming and yelped, "Hey, boss — look!"

Taliaferro spun around, hand going toward his gun, but he stopped the movement when he saw Shayne's calm, unhurried walk.

Shayne stepped up to him and said, "Everybody all right here?"

Taliaferro gestured at the bodies on the ground. "We lost a couple. Are you the guy who

helped us?"

"Yeah. I'm Mike Shayne."

Taliaferro squinted at him in the dim light, then said, "So you are. We've never met, but I've seen you around. I'm Vince Taliaferro. I never thought I'd be thanking you for saving my skin."

"It looked as if the odds weren't too even."

Neither man had offered to shake hands. Shayne could see Jill standing behind Taliaferro. Unlike some of the other women she seemed completely unruffled. When she spoke, her voice was bright with excitement.

"So you're the famous Mike Shayne," she said. "You sure are big."

Shayne frowned and hesitated before he replied. There was no hint in the girl's voice that she remembered their earlier meeting. Making a sudden decision, he threw out a line to test her reaction. "Are you okay, lady?"

"Why, yes, I'm just fine, Mr. Shayne." She moved closer to him. "Or should I call you Mike?"

Shayne couldn't believe it. She was like a totally different person. He said, "You can call me anything you like."

She was close enough now that he could smell her perfume. She said, "I'm Annie. And I like you."

Almost before he knew what was happening, she had thrown her arms around his neck and pressed her lips to his. She plastered her ripe young body against

him. Her lips were soft and yielding.

Shayne broke the kiss after a moment, acutely aware of the cold stare Taliaferro was giving him. He began to unwrap himself and said, "A simple *thank you* would have been plenty."

"But I'm so *grateful!*" Jill said. "And I want to show my gratitude!"

Taliaferro cut in brusquely. "Yeah, *I'm grateful*, too, Shayne, but right now we got things to do. The cops will be here soon, and I'd like for things to be cleaned up a little bit."

On the heels of his words came the wail of a siren. Shayne said, "I need to be moving on myself. Take it easy."

"What about me?" Jill pouted.

"You, too . . ." Shayne almost slipped and called her by her real name, which would have given away his connection with her, but he caught himself in time. "... Annie."

"Maybe Mike would take me home," she purred.

Taliaferro put a hand on her arm roughly. "I'll take you home. Now get in the house."

"All right, all *right!*" she complained. "Jeez, I'm going."

Shayne was frowning and tugging at his earlobe as he strode back to his car through the darkness. The change in Jill was uncanny. At least he hadn't needed to worry about her recognizing him.

He would have liked to hang around the neighborhood so that he could see that Jill got home safely, but with the police on the way in response to all the shooting, it might be a better idea to fade out of the picture. He knew that Peter Painter, the Miami Beach Chief of Police and an old adversary, would love to haul him in for questioning and keep him on ice for hours.

Shayne left the area quickly, heading back across the bay to Miami. The night's action had made it obvious that Jill Whittington needed help. She needed psychiatric care, and as long as she was associating with characters like Vince Taliaferro, she was liable to need someone around to pull her bacon out of the fire.

All in all, Mike Shayne was downright worried!

IV

WHEN SHAYNE got back to his apartment, he shed his hat, coat and tie, then built himself a decent drink. He sat down in his favorite chair by the telephone table and pulled the instrument over. The business card he took from his pocket had Arthur Jenkins' home phone number written on it in pencil. Shayne dialed with a blunt finger.

Jenkins himself answered on the third ring. The redhead told him, "This is Shayne. There was some trouble tonight."

"Trouble? What *kind* of trou-

ble?" The lawyer's voice was immediately tense. "Is Jill all right?"

"Yeah, physically she's fine. She got mixed up in a shooting scrape between her boyfriend and one of his business competitors."

"Her boyfriend? Jeff Braddock?"

"I don't know any Braddock. I'm talking about Vince Taliaferro. Do you know him?"

Jenkins was hesitant. "Isn't he involved in organized crime?"

Shayne barked a short laugh. "You might say that! Anyway, there was quite a bit of shooting and a couple of flunkys got themselves killed, but Jill wasn't hurt."

"Have you reported this to the police?"

"Don't worry, Petey Painter will find out about it. The cops were on their way when I left."

"What about Jill? You didn't just leave her there, did you?"

"Taliaferro said he would take her home. I didn't want to spend the night talking to the cops."

There was a short silence on the other end. Then Jenkins said, "I suppose it's all right. I have an arrangement with Forbes, the butler at the mansion. He'll call me when she comes in and let me know that she's home safely."

"Who's this Braddock you mentioned?" Shayne asked.

"He's a boy Jill goes to school with, another journalism student. I think he has quite a crush on her. Did Jill see you tonight,

Mr. Shayne?"

Shayne's gray eyes took on a stormy look as he frowned. "She saw me, all right, but she sure didn't act like the girl I met this afternoon. She didn't seem to remember me at all. She called herself Annie, just as you said. It was freaky."

Jenkins sighed heavily. "I wish I knew what caused her to start acting like this, Mr. Shayne."

"I've got a friend who's a damn good psychologist, Jenkins, if you could talk Jill into seeing him."

"I'll try. Please keep me informed, Mr. Shayne."

"Right," Shayne hung up.

He grabbed a quick shower and was towelling his coarse red hair dry when the phone rang. He muttered a curse, wrapped the towel around his middle, and stalked into the living room to answer it.

"Shayne," he snapped.

"Hello, shamus," a voice purred. "I hear you've been over in my bailiwick tonight." Shayne had no trouble recognizing Peter Painter's tones.

"Look, Painter," he rasped, "I'm busy right now. If you want something, spit it out and save the snake oil for later."

"All right, Shayne, if that's the way you want to play. What do you know about a shooting at Vince Taliaferro's house tonight?"

"Who says I know anything about a shooting?"

"Don't try to get cute, Shayne. A reliable source says you were there. Two guys were killed that we know of, and if you don't tell me how you're mixed up in this, I'll put you behind bars until you do!"

"On what charge?" Shayne growled.

"As a material witness, damn-it!"

"That won't hold water unless you can prove I was there, and you know it."

Shayne could practically see Painter fuming. After a moment, the foppish Miami Beach cop said, "It wouldn't have anything to do with Jill Whittington, would it?"

"Who?" Shayne asked casually.

"A crazy rich dame that was with Taliaferro. Her ID said she was Jill Whittington, but she claimed her name was Annie. She got excited when we tried to question her and put up quite a fuss. One of my men got a clawed-up face."

Shayne bit back the curse that sprang to his lips. He had hoped Taliaferro would get Jill away from there before the cops arrived.

"Maybe you should hire tougher cops," he giped. "Then they wouldn't have so much trouble giving ladies the third degree."

That broke Painter's composure, as Shayne had hoped it would. The little police chief broke into a string of curses, giving Shayne the excuse to say, "I

don't have to listen to this," and slam the receiver down.

That violent slam drowned out the sound of the lock on the front door clicking back under the expert pressure of a lockpick. When Shayne turned around, the door was swinging open.

Three figures burst through. Shayne saw the guns in their hands and moved to grab for his own before he realized that it was in the bedroom. The closest thing he had to a weapon was the soggy towel wrapped around his waist, and there wasn't much firepower to it.

"Just hold it, Shayne!" one of the gunmen rapped. "Don't make us hurt you."

Shayne considered his predicament and forced a wry grin to his lips. "I wouldn't dream of it," he said. "What does Vince want?"

He had recognized them as three of Taliaferro's sidemen from earlier in the evening. The one who had spoken before said, "He just wants to talk to you. He told us to bring you, but he didn't say in what condition, as long as you're still alive. You gave us a hand earlier, and I'd like to keep things peaceful."

"You and me both, brother," Shayne said. "Can I at least put some clothes on?"

"Sure."

Their gunbarrels kept him covered as he threw some clothes on his rangy body. He tried to

pump them about why Taliaferro wanted to see him, but none of them would talk.

He thought he struck a nerve, though, when he asked, "Did Vince's flaky girlfriend get home all right?"

The three gunmen exchanged quick looks, then the spokesman said, "Don't worry about her, just hurry up. We don't want the boss to get impatient."

Worry tickled at Shayne's brain. He wished he could call Arthur Jenkins and find out what he had heard — if anything.

When he was dressed, the three of them took him down in the freight elevator of the apartment hotel. They had slipped their guns back into their pockets, but Shayne was still very aware of the weapons.

Their car, one of the big Lincolns, was parked on the street. Shayne was prodded into the back seat. Two of the men flanked him while the third drove.

It didn't take long to get back to Miami Beach. Nothing more was said during the trip.

The car pulled up at the front door of Vince Taliaferro's house. This time, out of sight of the street, the guns were in plain view. They never wavered as Shayne was escorted from the car into the house.

Once inside, a short flight of steps led down into a dropped living room. Shayne went down the steps with the guns at his

back. Across the room. Vince Taliaferro was sitting on a plush sofa upholstered in a garish shade of purple velvet.

The redhead fixed a cold glare on him. After a moment of silence, Shayne said, "What the hell's the idea of sending your goons after me, Taliaferro?"

The mobster lifted a tumbler of whiskey to his lips and sipped from it. He said, "I was real glad to see you earlier, Shayne. You helped us out of a tight spot. But I didn't like the way Annie acted."

"You'd better take that up with Annie."

"No, I'm taking it up with you!" Taliaferro slapped the tumbler down on a glass-topped coffee table. "Annie's my girl, and I don't want her messing around with any big dumb detectives."

If anything, Shayne's gaze grew colder. It was positively glacial. He said quietly, "You don't have to worry about me cutting in on you. I'm not interested in the girl."

Taliaferro's swarthy face took on a calculating expression. He said, "Oh, *no*? You never did mention, Shayne, why you just happened to be passing by when Manny March came gunning for me."

"Just lucky, I guess."

"Are you sure it wasn't because Annie was with me?"

Shayne didn't say anything. A moment of silence passed, then Taliaferro stood up and stepped

closer, putting his face only inches from Shayne's. He said, "Just how well do you know Annie?"

"Not as well as I'm going to," Shayne replied.

Taliaferro's lips pulled back from his teeth in a grimace. In an icy voice, he said, "You'd better understand something, Shayne. Annie is my girl, and I don't want you anywhere around her. I don't want you within a hundred miles!"

Shayne's face became even more truculent as he bit off, "No second-rate hood is going to give me orders."

Rage contorted Taliaferro's features. The two men were standing toe-to-toe, and the gangster's fist suddenly came up and launched itself at Shayne.

Shayne's left hand shot out and caught Taliaferro's wrist, stopping the blow in mid-air. He was well aware of the three gunmen behind him and could see them out of the corner of his eye, but he was also aware that while he was in such close quarters with their boss, they couldn't do anything.

Shayne kept his fingers clamped on Taliaferro's wrist. His feet were already planted in a wide-legged stance. He pivoted from the waist and drove his left fist deep into Taliaferro's stomach.

The other man's breath puffed out with a whoosh. He bent almost double and might have fallen had it not been for Shayne's grip on him.

The big detective was already swinging himself and Taliaferro around so that he was facing the gunmen. They looked ready to start blasting as soon as they had the chance.

Shayne didn't want to give them that chance. Taliaferro gasped, "Don't kill him!" Hatred ran deep in his voice as he went on, "Just make him *wish* he was dead!"

The men slipped the guns back into their holsters and began advancing. Quickly, Shayne backhanded Taliaferro and gave him a shove that sent him sprawling into them. The redhead leaped for the door.

One of the goons flung a hand out and clapped it down on his shoulder. Shayne jerked away from it and shot a straight left that bounced the man backward.

That slowed him down enough for the other two to recover and reach him. They both swung punches.

Escape was cut off for the moment, and there was nothing else to do but fight. Shayne set his jaw and plunged into the fracas.

It lasted a wild two minutes. Shayne took several solid smashes to the body, but he gave better than he got. His knobby fist landed on a nose with a satisfying crunch, and blood spurted.

Finally, an opening presented itself. His adversaries staggered momentarily back, and Shayne

took the opportunity to make another leap for freedom.

He made it up the steps and to the door, flinging it open and dashing out into the night. Pursuit pounded right behind him.

Shayne ran through the palm-shadowed yard heedlessly, trusting to luck not to bash his brains out against a tree. One of the men chasing him got anxious and disobeyed Taliaferro's orders, pulling his gun and snapping several shots at the detective's fleeing figure.

There was a busy boulevard a block away. Shayne made for it as fast as his long legs would carry him. It went against the grain to run away, but he couldn't do Jill Whittington any good if he were dead or in the hospital. He was outnumbered to begin with, and Taliaferro could bring up plenty of reinforcements.

When he gained the street and glanced back over his shoulder, there was no sign of anyone chasing him. A bullet could still come out of the darkness, though.

A cab came cruising by. Shayne flung a hand up and called out and, when the taxi slowed down, jerked the door open and piled into the back seat.

"Where to?" the driver asked, as Shayne tried to catch his breath.

Shayne gave him the address of his apartment hotel and then leaned back against the seat, closing his eyes. There was a sore

spot where he had been hit underneath his ribs that was beginning to throb . . .

V

SHAYNE WAS back outside the Whittington mansion the next morning, waiting for Jill.

A phone call to Jenkins when he got home the night before had produced the information that Jill had reached her home all right. The lawyer also told him that she had several college classes the next day, and that she usually left to attend them around ten o'clock.

Shayne took up his position at nine-thirty. As he waited, he remembered wryly how Jenkins had reacted to the latest development, Shayne's run-in with Taliaferro.

"My God!" the lawyer had exclaimed. "Are you sure you want to continue the case, Shayne?"

"I'm not afraid of Vince Taliaferro," the redhead told him bluntly. "Until Jill admits she needs help, somebody has to be around to make sure she doesn't get herself killed."

And you've appointed yourself for the job, he thought now, smiling crookedly as he settled in the front seat of the Buick.

When the hands of his watch stood at three minutes to ten, the little yellow MG came scooting down the driveway. Jill took the

turn onto the road at a more sedate pace this time, and Shayne took that to be a sign she was more herself this morning.

She drove straight to the university, parked her car in a student parking lot, and went inside one of the buildings. Shayne cruised around the vicinity for ten minutes, looking for a place to park without any luck. Finally, he decided to park the unstickered Buick in the students' lot and take his chances on a ticket.

From where he sat, he could see the door of the building that Jill had entered. He smoked and waited for her to come out again, and while he waited, his thoughts turned to Lucy. He wondered where she was and what she was doing right now.

A little less than an hour later, Jill reappeared and went striding across the campus toward another building. Shayne followed on foot as discreetly as he could, but among the milling college students, his big redheaded form stuck out plainly.

Jill was dressed in jeans, blouse and sweater this morning, and she looked every inch the nice bright young woman that Shayne had met the day before. He could detect no sign of the hard flashy semi-tramp who called herself Annie.

Shayne spent the next few hours trailing Jill around the campus, staying out of her sight. He ate in the school cafeteria when she

did, sitting on the opposite side of the room.

While Jill was eating, a boy about her own age came up and sat down beside her. She didn't look very glad to see him. Although he began talking quickly, she seemed to be making only perfunctory replies.

Shayne could tell by the wide set of the boy's shoulders and the way he carried himself that he was an athlete. Jenkins had mentioned a boy named Jeff Braddock who had a crush on Jill. This might be he. If it was, Jill wasn't returning his obvious affection.

After a few minutes, she said something sharply to the boy, then stood up, stalking rapidly out of the cafeteria. Shayne could spot a brushoff when he saw one. The boy gazed disconsolately at Jill's retreating figure.

Shayne followed her out. He was rapidly growing tired of this phase of the case. There seemed to be no need for his presence as long as Jill's normal personality was in control. She would be through with her classes for the day soon, however, and would be heading home. Things might change then.

Jill's next class was her last. When she left the building where it was held, she went directly back to the parking lot and her car.

Shayne strode along about a hundred yards behind her. He got to his own car just as Jill

was pulling out of the lot. There was a slip of paper under the Buick's windshield wiper and, as Shayne plucked it up, he saw that it was the expected ticket from the university police.

He had the door unlocked and was about to open it when a heavy hand fell on his shoulder and a voice ordered, "Wait a minute, fella!"

Shayne swung around, shaking the hand off as he did so. The boy who had been talking to Jill in the cafeteria stood glaring at him. His determination wavered a bit when he saw the thunderous look on Shayne's face, but he swallowed and went on, "I want to talk to you."

"Then make it fast, kid. I don't have much time."

"Just who are you?"

"Hell, I could ask you the same question," Shayne growled, growing more impatient by the second. Jill's car was over a block away now.

"You've been following Jill Whittington around all day, and I want to know why!"

"I don't see that it's any of your business." Shayne opened the car door.

"Damn it, I'm in love with her!" The boy hit the car door with an open hand, nearly slamming it on Shayne's fingers. He moved between Shayne and the car.

Anger boiled up inside the detective. In a low voice, he said, "Get out of my way." Jill

was out of sight now.

The boy's face set in tense lines. He was almost as big as Shayne. Shayne moved to reach around him, and his fist came up and directed itself at Shayne's jaw.

Moving unhurriedly, Shayne slid to one side and let the blow hit empty air. Off-balance now, the boy staggered toward him.

Shayne drove a hard left to the boy's stomach, followed that with a right under the heart that drove his opponent back against the car, pale and shaken and gasping for breath.

Jill would be long gone by now, but he could probably catch up with her at the Whittington mansion. Since this boy had delayed him, the best thing to do might be to pump the young man for whatever information he had.

Shayne took him by the shoulders, noticing the curious stares they were getting from passing students. Only the fact that they were in a large and crowded parking lot had kept the brief fight from drawing more attention.

The boy looked badly frightened now. Shayne snapped, "What's your name?"

"J-Jeff Braddock."

Well, relax, Jeff. If you're interested in Jill Whittington's welfare, then we're on the same side. My name is Mike Shayne."

"The private detective?"

"That's right. I've been hired

to help Jill."

Shayne released his hold on Jeff's shoulders. The boy seemed to be calming down now. He said, "I thought you looked familiar. Is Annie the reason you were hired?"

"You know about Annie?"

"Yes. That's why I'm so worried about Jill. She doesn't even seem to know me when she's like that. She won't let me near her."

"She didn't seem too happy to see you in the cafeteria earlier, either," Shayne said pointedly.

"That's different." Jeff spoke with more heat. "I love Jill, and she'll love me, too, someday."

Shayne doubted that, but it was none of his business. Commenting on it would only make Braddock angrier. Instead, he asked, "Do you have any idea what might have caused the change in Jill?"

"No, it took me completely by surprise."

"Have you talked to her about it?"

"I've tried to. She claims she doesn't know what I'm talking about. I've talked to her on the phone when she was in her Annie personality, and she doesn't even remember it later."

Shayne frowned and tugged at his left earlobe. That fitted the pattern, all right. He said, "Do you know a man named Vince Taliaferro?"

Jeff frowned too. "I don't

think so," he replied. "The name sounds familiar. Who is he?"

"A friend of Annie's. But he's not the kind of friend that Jill Whittington needs."

Worry etched lines in Braddock's young face. He exclaimed, "I *knew* she'd get in trouble!"

"Take it easy," Shayne advised. "The only reason I told you about him is so you'll keep your eyes open. Taliaferro's a rough character and he's possessive. He might not like your interest in Jill. But don't worry about her. I'll be looking out for her, and I won't let her get hurt."

"That makes me feel a little better, but I still wish there was something I could do."

"There's not," Shayne told him bluntly, "unless it's to persuade Jill to see a doctor. Leave the other to me."

"All right."

Braddock moved out of the way, and Shayne got into the car. He had lost some time, but he had gained a kind of ally, even though Jeff Braddock's usefulness was debatable. At least the boy was no longer hostile. Now Shayne needed to get to the Whittington house and make sure Jill was still there.

He rolled down the window and started the car. Jeff Braddock, still standing next to it, said, "Mr. Shayne?"

"Yeah?"

"Don't let anything happen to Jill."

VI

THE REST OF the afternoon passed uneventfully with Jill at home. Shayne saw her car there when he drove past and then telephoned Forbes, the butler, who gave him a surreptitious confirmation of Jill's presence.

Shayne took a break long enough for supper. He grabbed a hamburger, though he would have preferred a good steak and plenty of Martell, but there wasn't time for that. If Jill went out again, he wanted to be in a position to follow her.

He made a quick call to Arthur Jenkins to fill the lawyer in on the current situation. Then it was back to the vicinity of the Whittington estate.

When the night had again fallen in Miami, Jill Whittington's MG came shooting down the driveway and out onto the street. Parked a block away, Shayne stubbed out the cigarette he had been smoking and hit the Buick's ignition.

Jill's destination was Miami Beach again. Shayne could tell by the way she drove that she was back in the throes of whatever it was that gripped her and turned her into the girl who called herself Annie.

This time, she didn't go to the penthouse disco on top of the hotel, but drove on past it. She went instead to a supper club and

lounge that was somewhat less than elegant. Shayne knew that certain of Miami's gangland figures frequented the place, among them Vince Taliaferro.

When Jill parked the car and got out, the redhead could see that she was wearing a tight red-silk dress with high slits up the sides. Her honey-colored hair was piled on top of her head.

Shayne parked down the street and ambled back to the club. He went through the big wooden front door into the dim interior. The bar was on the left, the dining area on the right. He spotted Jill's bright red dress and saw that she was sitting at a table by herself.

Shayne went through an arched entrance into the bar. A mirror that ran the length of one wall would let him sit at the bar and still keep and eye on Jill.

The club was fairly full. Shayne didn't recognize any of the patrons. He settled his rugged frame on a stool at the bar and gave his order to the red-aproned bartender.

As he sat there, he could see that Jill was drinking heavily again tonight. She seemed to be waiting for someone.

That someone arrived a quarter of an hour later. Shayne was sipping his drink when the door opened and Vince Taliaferro came into the club's foyer, flanked by two of the men who had taken Shayne from his apartment the night before.

Taliaferro went to the table where Jill was sitting, while his two men turned to the left and came into the bar. Shayne kept his back to them, but he could watch their approach in the mirror. They could see him, too, as was evident by the looks that suddenly appeared on their faces.

Shayne finished his drink calmly and set the glass down on the bar as they came nearer. They slipped onto the vacant stools on either side of him, and the one who had been the spokesman the night before said, "Looks like you didn't learn your lesson, Shayne."

"Maybe I just had lousy teachers," Shayne replied curtly.

"We'd be glad to give you a crash course," the other one said.

The bartender, who was nearby, heard all this and began to look extremely nervous. Shayne said to the men, "You don't want to bust the place all up, do you? Get blood all over everything?"

"Listen, Shayne, you think you're tough. Hell, you *are* tough! But a lot of guys work for Vince, and every single one of them would like to plant you six feet under. You think you're tough enough to take all of us on? You'd better think about that before you go sticking your nose in where it don't belong."

"All right, you've had your say," Shayne's voice was cold and hard. "Now why don't you crawl

back to your boss like good dogs?"

For a second, he thought they were going to lose control and attack him despite the surroundings. Then they stood up and the first one said between gritted teeth, "You'd better remember what you're told." They marched out of the bar.

In the mirror, Shayne watched them go straight to Vince Taliaferro. When they spoke to him, his head jerked in the redhead's direction. Their eyes locked for a moment in the mirror, and Shayne could see the hatred burning brightly in Taliaferro's.

After a few moments, Taliaferro switched his gaze abruptly and spoke sharply to his men. They nodded and left the club. Shayne felt an uneasy prickling along the back of his neck.

He would have to be careful this night.

Jill seemed to be drunk by then. She was unsteady on her feet as she stood up a few minutes later. Her laughter reached Shayne's ears. She weaved between tables on her way to the ladies' room. Taliaferro watched her with a slight look of annoyance and disgust on his face.

Shayne felt a little annoyed and disgusted himself. Still, he was surprised when Taliaferro dropped money on the table to pay for the drinks, then got up and stalked out of the club.

When Jill came back and saw that Taliaferro was gone, she

looked around in confusion. Shayne wanted to go to her and offer to take her home, but decided to wait and see what she would do next.

After a few minutes, inspiration seemed to come over Jill. She steered a wobbly course out the front door into the parking lot. Shayne gave her ten seconds, then followed.

She shouldn't be driving in her condition, but when Shayne came out the door, she was already at her car. He called out to her, remembering to use the name Annie, but she didn't seem to hear. She climbed into the little car and roared out into the street.

Cursing, Shayne raced for his car. He would have to get on her tail and stay there, hoping she wouldn't have an accident. By the time he got on the street, she was two cars ahead of him.

She was driving fast, and Shayne had trouble closing up the gap in traffic that was heavier than usual considering the hour of the evening. When a red light finally made her bring the MG to a stop, she was the first in line that included two other cars and then Shayne's Buick.

They were all in the outside lane. In his rear-view mirror, Shayne saw another pair of headlights moving up fairly rapidly on the inside. As the vehicle came closer, some instinct made Shayne turn his head. He caught a glimpse of the barrel of a shotgun

as the other car pulled up even with him.

He threw himself down toward the floorboard without even thinking about it. The heavy bore shotgun boomed, and glass crashed above him, splattered shards of it showering down on him.

The driver of the other car slammed the accelerator to the floor and sent it speeding through the intersection against the light. The little yellow MG joined it. By the time Shayne sat up, both of them were out of sight.

He hadn't got a look at the license number or the occupants of the car, but he would have been willing to bet they were Vince Taliaferro's men. That wasn't what he was worried about, though.

Annie was on the loose now.

The booming shots had drawn plenty of attention. A Miami Beach police cruiser screeched up. Shayne groaned to himself and brushed slivers of glass off his coat. This would be more time wasted.

He was lucky. The officers recognized him, of course, but they bought his story when he told them he had no idea why anyone would be shooting at him. They questioned him for a few minutes, then told him they'd be in touch if they needed any more information.

As they moved on to question the other witnesses, he thought he'd hate to be in their shoes when Peter Painter got wind of this.

When he found out that Mike Shayne had been involved in another shooting and hadn't been brought in for his personal interrogation, he'd hit the roof.

Shayne found a phone booth and punched out the number of the Whittington mansion. When Forbes answered, he said, "This is Shayne. Has Miss Whittington come back in yet?"

"No, sir, she hasn't. Is something wrong?"

"Yeah, she gave me the slip and she's drunk."

"Oh, dear!" Forbes sounded ruffled. "Does Mr. Jenkins know?"

"I'm about to call him right now. If Miss Whittington comes in, you let him know."

"Yes, sir. I certainly will."

Shayne broke the connection, dropped another coin and jabbed the digits of Jenkins' number. The attorney answered almost at once.

"Shayne here. Jill got away from me, and she thinks she's Annie."

"Oh, my God!" Jenkins breathed. "What can we do?"

"Not a hell of a lot. I'll check Taliaferro's house and see if she's there, but that's about all I can do now. Do you know anywhere else she might be?"

"No . . . no. Who knows where she goes when she's like this? I'm afraid I just don't know."

"Well, I'll do what I can," Shayne said. "I'm sorry she got

away from me, Jenkins, but I think it was planned. She gave me the slip while I was ducking a shotgun blast."

"What?"

"Somebody put a load of buckshot through my car window. It was supposed to go through my head. I'd lay odds Taliaferro was behind it."

"And you think Jill was involved in this plan?" Jenkins was incredulous.

"I don't know. She could have been. She's a very sick girl, Jenkins. Maybe you should start thinking about filing some commitment papers."

"Commitment . . . ? Oh, no. It hasn't gone that far, surely."

"I hope not," Shayne replied grimly. "But you can worry about that after I find her."

He hung the phone up and got back in his car. He headed across town, toward Vince Taliaferro's house, the scene of the pitched battle the night before.

But when he got there, the house was dark. A quick check of the garage and grounds told him that Jill's yellow MG was nowhere to be seen. That left Shayne at a dead end.

Angry with the entire situation, he drove back to his apartment. As soon as he got there, he thought, he would telephone Jenkins again. Perhaps the lawyer had heard something by now.

Shayne left the Buick with the shattered window in the base-

ment parking garage and rode upstairs in the elevator. As he stalked down the hall toward his apartment, he groped in his pocket for his keys.

He opened the door carefully, well aware that Vince Taliaferro was capable of having a surprise waiting for him. His fingers wrapped themselves around the butt of his gun as he swung the panel open and reached inside the room to flick on the lights.

Nothing looked out of order. Shayne stepped inside and listened intently, hearing nothing but the gentle sounds of traffic from the street below. He let his gun slip back down into its holster.

He dropped his hat on the table and fired up a cigarette as he dialed Jenkins' number. The lawyer snatched up the phone as soon as the first ring began, and Shayne knew without asking that Jill still hadn't turned up.

Jenkins was more upset and worried than ever, and Shayne didn't have any news that would cheer him up. The redhead spoke with him briefly, and they both agreed to call the other if either one heard anything.

After he had hung up, Shayne poured himself a glass of Martell and sipped it as he headed for the bedroom. Some light from the living room spilled into it when he opened the door, but he reached for the switch anyway.

"Don't turn the light on," a low, breathless voice said.

Shayne froze. His gray eyes tried to pierce the shadowy dimness of the room. The voice had come from the bed, and he recognized it.

He saw movement, heard the bed squeak slightly as she sat up. He could see her fair hair now, and the expanse of creamy white underneath it told him she was nude.

"I think the darkness is so much more romantic, don't you?"

"What are you doing here?" he asked, uncertain whether to call her Jill or Annie.

"Waiting for you, Mike," she replied, stretching. "I'd still like to pay you back for last night."

So she was still Annie. Shayne took a healthy swallow of the brandy and said, "You don't owe me anything."

"Oh, but I *do*." She swung her long legs out of bed and stood up. She came toward him slowly, swaying in the shadows. When she was a foot away, she laid her hands lightly on his broad chest and whispered, "I owe you everything. And that's what I intend to give you."

With a sound that was half-laugh and half-growl, Shayne circled her with his free arm, pulled her tightly to him. He could feel the soft warmth of her through his clothes.

Her head was tilted, her eyes closed. Shayne brought his lips down on hers for a long moment. He could feel her hands clutching

at his back, stealing inside his coat...

"You're a sexy kid," he said, taking his lips away from hers. "But I'm not interested in kids. Why don't you run on home?"

"But Mike—"

"Sorry." His voice was flat, final.

So was hers when she spoke after a moment's silence. "All right," she said. "If that's the way you want it."

Too late, he felt his gun leaving its holster. He made a grab for her as she sprang away but missed. Her earlier drunkenness had vanished, and the barrel of the gun was rock-steady as she pointed it at his belly. That much he could see in the dim light.

"Nobody turns me down," she spat. "When I want something, I take it, and if I can't have it, nobody can!"

"Take it easy," Shayne rumbled. "Killing me won't do you any good."

"It might. I've never killed anyone before. I wonder how it would feel."

"It feels bad. Take it from me."

"I'd rather find out for myself." Her voice was full of malicious glee.

Shayne said, "That's enough." His wrist flicked suddenly, and the contents of the glass he still held splashed into Jill's face. She gasped and tried to squeeze the trigger, but Shayne had already closed the gap between them with

one long stride. A big hand slapped the gun aside while another grabbed her shoulder.

"No!" Jill screamed. "Let me go!" She began to struggle wildly in his grasp, writhing and throwing ineffectual punches. She was a wildcat momentarily, until Shayne lost what little patience he had left. He threw her on the bed, and when she tried to get back up, clipped her lightly on the chin with a knobby fist. The light tap was enough. Jill fell back on the bed, stunned and still for a moment.

Shayne threw the blanket over her nudity and stalked back out into the living room. He jerked the phone up. When Arthur Jenkins answered eagerly, Shayne barked, "You'd better get over here, Jenkins. This All-American, clean-cut heiress of yours just tried to seduce me and then shoot me with my own gun!"

VII

SHAYNE'S GRIM mood was still with him when he came into his office the next morning. He tossed his hat on the rack, flipped through the mail, then sat down at the desk to scowl darkly at the wall.

His memory of the night before was vivid. Jill, or rather Annie — it was hard to think of them as being the same girl — had still been carrying on when Jenkins arrived to take her home.

It had taken both of them and

the threat of further violence on Shayne's part to calm her down enough for Jenkins to leave with her. He hoped the attorney had got her back to the Whittington mansion without any further trouble.

Shayne lit a cigarette and put in a call to Jenkins' office. When Jenkins came on the line, the red-head said, "This is Shayne. Did you get Jill home all right last night?"

"Oh, good morning, Shayne." Jenkins' voice was heavy. "Yes, all the fight seemed to have gone out of her by the time I got her home. I talked to Forbes this morning, and he said she went to bed and to sleep."

"That's good," Shayne grunted. "Have you thought any more about what I said yesterday?"

"About committing Jill? Yes, I'm afraid I have."

"I know you're close to the girl. Damn it, I like her, too! But she's in bad shape, Jenkins. When she starts going around waving guns at people, it's time to do something."

"I know it, Shayne. Much as I hate to admit it, I think you're right. I'm going to start working on it today."

"I guess you won't need me any more, then."

"Oh, no — I wish you'd continue with the job. Until I get things settled for sure, I'd feel better if you were looking out for Jill."

Shayne stubbed out the butt of his cigarette in the ashtray as he said, "Couldn't you get Forbes to keep her home? Take away her car keys or something?"

"I suppose we could try." Jenkins sounded doubtful.

The door to Shayne's office opened. He looked up and saw who it was, then said into the phone, "Maybe it wouldn't be a good idea after all. I'll have to talk to you later." He hung up before Jenkins could ask any questions.

Jill Whittington said, "Hello, Mr. Shayne. Do you remember me?"

Shayne stood up slowly. Jill was wearing a modest blue dress and her eyes were clear. She bore little resemblance to the girl who had lain in wait for Shayne the night before.

"Of course, Miss Whittington," Shayne said. "Have a seat."

He watched her warily as she sat down. She looked calm but serious. "I was hoping you would remember me from the other day," she said. "Do you mind if I ask you a question?"

"Not at all." Shayne tugged at his earlobe. She seemed to have no memory at all of their other meetings. He didn't think she was a good enough actress to fake it.

"Why were you at my house the other day? Uncle Arthur wouldn't tell me. He said it was just a business deal."

Shayne considered what tack

would be best to take. He said carefully, "If Jenkins didn't tell you, maybe it would be best if I didn't either."

Jill leaned forward, her face becoming more intense. "It was about me, wasn't it? He told you I was crazy!"

Jill's air of calm reserve had cracked. Shayne sat silently as she stood up and began to pace. "I *know* he told you I was crazy," she went on, "But I'm *not*! There's nothing wrong with me. Not *really*!"

"Slow down," Shayne advised. "I'm listening if you want to talk about it."

She knotted her fingers together. "I've always been healthy, at least until a few months ago. Then I started . . . blacking out. Sometimes just for a few minutes, sometimes longer. Now it's hours! And I always have a headache when I wake up. Naturally I'm worried about it, but Uncle Arthur . . . Uncle Arthur says I do horrible things when I'm blacked out! He says I get drunk and run around with gangsters and get into trouble and it just isn't true! I know it isn't! I wouldn't do things like that."

It had all come out in a rush. Shayne ran a thumb along his rugged jawline and said bluntly, "Why come to me? You've got a medical problem, and I'm no doctor."

"You're the best private detective in the city. I think Uncle

Arthur hired you, and I want to know why."

"Assuming he did, that would be privileged information."

She whirled on him, her blue eyes blazing. "Don't fence with me, Mr. Shayne!" she snapped. "If Arthur Jenkins hired you to follow me around because he thinks I'm crazy, I want to know about it!"

Shayne didn't know how a psychologist would handle such a situation, but he knew when his Irish temper was about to flare up. He bit back the hot words that were on his tongue and forced himself to ask, "What if I tell you you're wrong? What then?"

Jill took a deep breath. "Then I want to hire you. I want you to prove that I'm not crazy."

Her words threw Shayne for a loss. She was pleading for his help. How could he tell her that she really had been behaving insanely?

But she had to know. She had to be convinced to seek help in the right place. In as gentle a voice as he could muster, he said, "Listen, Miss Whittington. I have been following you. And everything Arthur Jenkins has told you is true."

"No . . . I don't believe it."

"How about Vince Taliaferro?"

He threw the name out to test her reaction, but there was none, other than bewilderment. Jill looked blank and asked, "Who?"

"Does the name Annie mean

anything to you?"

"I know that's what I'm supposed to call myself when I'm on one of my supposed binges, but that's not true, either."

"And you don't remember trying to shoot me last night? Or the rest of it?"

Jill looked aghast. "I-I thought you could help me," she stammered. "But you're just like everyone else. You think I'm crazy, too!"

"I *will* help you," Shayne said earnestly. "I know a doctor —"

"I don't *need* a doctor!" She turned and slammed out of the office.

Shayne rose to go after her, then shook his red head. Her own personality, shattered though it might be, was in control now. She would be able to get home all right. It was a good thing, Shayne considered, that Jenkins was moving on those commitment papers.

A lunch date with Tim Rourke took Shayne to The Beef House shortly after twelve o'clock. He found the lanky reporter in his usual booth, attacking a straight gin. The waiter brought Shayne his usual.

When a good portion of it was gone, the redheaded detective said, "Anything new in the world?"

"You tell me," Rourke said capily.

"What do you mean?"

"How about that case you were

working on the other day? How did it turn out? Is the Whittington girl any better?"

Shayne finished off his drink. "It's one case I wish I hadn't taken."

"Gone sour on you, huh?"

"You can't help people who won't help themselves."

Rourke whistled. "The shamus waxes philosophic! That's a switch."

"I'll wax your face," Shayne growled. "Let's eat."

The two old friends ordered, Rourke's prodigious appetite matching Shayne's, as usual. Wisely, because of the redhead's dark mood, the newsman didn't pressure him into revealing the details of the Whittington case. Instead, he asked, "Any word from Lucy?"

Shayne shook his head. "She thought she might be back tomorrow, though. I hope so."

They ate heartily, then said their goodbyes and went their separate ways, Shayne back to his office, Rourke back to his desk at the *News*.

The telephone was ringing shrilly when Shayne came into the office. He picked up the receiver and said, "Mike Shayne."

An excited male voice said "This is Jeff Braddock, Mr. Shayne. Have you seen Jill today?"

"Yeah, she was here at my office earlier," Shayne replied. "Why?"

"Was she upset?"

"She was when she left. What's this about, Braddock?"

"She just called me and asked me to come over to her house. She's never done that before. She sounded awful, Mr. Shayne, not like herself at all."

"Why call me?" Shayne asked. "I would've figured you'd be over there like a shot."

"I kept thinking about what you said, about that Taliaferro guy. I'm afraid he might be watching the place. But after what Jill said . . ."

"What did she say?" Shayne demanded.

"Well . . . she talked like she was thinking about killing herself."

"I'll meet you there," Shayne said, and hung up.

That was a danger he had not considered. But, given Jill's troubled state of mind, it was a distinct possibility. He hurried down to his car and headed for the Whittington estate.

A tan Camaro was waiting for him when he got there. Jeff Braddock got out of it as Shayne was parking his Buick.

"I didn't go in yet," the big young man said. "I was waiting until you got here."

"Well then, let's go," Shayne snapped.

"Could — could I have a minute with her by myself first?"

"Sure. Somebody needs to get in there, though, so let's not waste

any more time."

Braddock rang the bell and, a moment later, a worried-looking Forbes opened the door. Braddock said, "I've got to see Jill. Is she all right?"

"You're young Braddock, aren't you? Come in, sir. I'm glad you're here. Miss Jill certainly doesn't seem herself."

Braddock bustled on into the house. Forbes looked quizzically at Shayne, but the big detective said, "I think I'll take a look around outside the house."

It would probably be better to let Jeff Braddock have first crack at talking to Jill, Shayne thought. She was almost certainly still mad at him from her morning visit to the office.

Shayne lit a cigarette and began to stroll around to the back of the sprawling estate. Anyone watching would have thought he was just taking a casual walk, but in actuality, his sharp eyes were checking for any signs of Vince Taliaferro or his men.

Shayne didn't believe for a minute that Taliaferro's interest was totally centered on the girl who called herself Annie. He had to be aware of her true identity, he had to have some sort of scheme to put the Whittington millions in his own pocket. He might well be watching this place.

Several minutes passed while Shayne was walking around the house. He had seen nothing to indicate the presence of Talia-

ferro. He took a last drag on the cigarette and wondered how Braddock was doing with Jill.

A gunshot split the afternoon silence.

It was followed a second later by shrill screams. Shayne snapped the butt away and headed for the front door on the dead run.

He jerked the door open and pounded into the entrance hall. Forbes was standing there looking shaken. The screaming was still coming from somewhere down the hall.

"*Snap out of it, man!*" Shayne barked at the ashen Forbes. "Where *are* they?"

"In — in the study," the butler quavered, pointing a shaky finger. "The third door."

It wasn't locked. Shayne slammed it open and stepped into the room where he had first discussed the case with Arthur Jenkins. His face was etched in grim, hard lines.

Jeff Braddock lay crumpled on the floor, blood spreading rapidly underneath him. He was completely still.

Standing over him, a gun in her hand and a horrified look on her face, was Jill Whittington.

VII

SHAYNE STOOD completely still for a moment, taking in the situation. Jill had stopped screaming, but she didn't even seem to be aware of his presence. All she had

eyes for was the body on the floor.

Shayne took a quick step forward and extended a long arm. He plucked the gun from Jill's unresisting fingers. She didn't notice. Her gaze was locked on Jeff Braddock.

Forbes had followed Shayne down the hall and was now standing in the doorway, looking shocked and unbelieving. Shayne snapped at him, "Go call the police. Tell them what happened here, and tell them I asked for Will Gentry."

"Yes, sir."

When Forbes had gone, Shayne turned back to the bloody scene beside Jeff Braddock. The pool of crimson on the floor was large by now, and Shayne knew without checking that the boy was dead. He felt for a pulse anyway, finding none.

There was a telephone on the desk. He picked it up and called Arthur Jenkins' office. He got through to the lawyer fairly quickly, said, "This is Shayne, Jenkins. You'd better get over to the Whittington house right away. Jill's shot and killed Jeff Braddock."

"What?"

"You heard me the first time. The cops have already been called, so you'd better hurry."

"All right, I'm on my way. My God, Shayne, I can't believe it!"

"Believe it," Shayne said.

He hung up and turned back to

Jill. She had been in a world of her own, but now as he watched, she seemed to come out of it. She shook her head numbly and said, "Jeff... Oh no! Jeff!"

Shayne put his big hands on her shoulders. "Listen to me, Jill," he rumbled. "You're in a hell of a mess. Now tell me exactly what happened. I'll try to help you if I can."

She looked at him uncomprehendingly. "Mr. Shayne, what are you doing here? What happened to Jeff?"

"Don't you know?"

"No, I don't remember. I can't remember *anything*. I must have blacked out again. I didn't even know he was here. Then, all of a sudden, I was standing there holding that gun and Jeff was on the floor. There was so much blood..."

Her body began to shake. Shayne gripped her shoulders more tightly. "Dammit, that's not any kind of a defense!" he snapped. "Why did you shoot him?"

"I don't know," Jill wailed. "I don't remember!"

Shayne released her and shook his head angrily. "This is one hell of a jam," he said. "I hope for your sake that Jenkins is a good lawyer!"

He lit a cigarette as Jill sat down on a chair, her eyes carefully avoiding the corpse now. Not far away, the wail of the police siren was coming closer.

Two uniformed officers were the

first on the scene. They took a look at the body, called the coroner and the morgue, then got statements from Shayne and Forbes. Shayne told them that Jill wasn't in shape to say anything yet.

Not long after the patrolmen got there, a beefy, cigar-chewing figure tramped down the hall and pushed into the room. Will Gentry said to Shayne, "Hello, Mike. I heard you'd been cutting capers the last few days. What's this all about?"

"Your man has a statement," Shayne told the Miami chief.

"Yeah, but how about telling *me*?"

The teams from the police lab and the coroner's office arrived just then, and Shayne drew Gentry over into a corner where they'd be out of the way.

"The pretty girl sitting there is my client," Shayne said in a low voice, "even though it was her lawyer who hired me. Her name is Jill Whittington. The boy on the floor is Jeff Braddock. He fancied himself to be her boyfriend."

"Did she shoot him?"

"She was alone with him and the gun was in her hand when I got there. I took it away from her. Be sure to mention that to the lab boys."

Gentry sighed. Then, "Does this have anything to do with the ruckus you've been raising across the bay?"

"Ruckus? You must've been talking to Petey Painter."

"Yeah, he's been on my back. Claims you've been shooting up his town. I don't know what he expects me to do with a wild man like you."

"He's got it backwards, as usual," Shayne replied. "People have been shooting at *me* every time I go over there."

"He said Vince Taliaferro was mixed up in it somehow."

"Yeah," Shayne nodded. "And it's all tied in with that poor kid over there."

"*'Poor'* kid?" Gentry echoed. "From what I hear, Jill Whittington is worth a bundle."

Shayne gave Gentry the story, finishing up just as Arthur Jenkins came hurrying into the room. He spotted Jill and went directly to her, his face a worried mask.

After talking to Jill for a moment, he came over to Shayne and Gentry, saying, "This is awful, just awful."

Shayne said, "Will, this is Arthur Jenkins, the girl's lawyer. Jenkins, Will Gentry."

Gentry grunted a greeting that Jenkins was too distracted to return. He said to Shayne, "I'm not a criminal lawyer, Mr. Shayne. I don't know how to handle things like this."

"Then you'd better find somebody that does," the redhead said curtly. "Jill's going to need all the help she can get."

The next hour was full of bustling activity as the technical crews worked at their respective skills

and Chief Gentry questioned Shayne and Forbes. On Jenkins' advice, Jill did not make a statement.

The mood in the room didn't lighten when Braddock's body was removed. If anything, it seemed to become heavier. Shayne couldn't see any way out for Jill Whittington, and everyone in the room seemed to know it.

Finally, Gentry said to her, "We'll have to take you in now, Miss Whittington. I'm sorry."

"That's all right," she said dully. "I understand."

Officers led Jill out, with Jenkins tagging along behind, still flustered. Gentry paused to say to Shayne, "You're taking this one pretty hard, aren't you, Mike?"

"Dammit, Will," Shayne replied, "the girl is sick, mentally ill."

Gentry nodded. "I agree with you. And from everything I've heard, if Jenkins finds her a good lawyer, she'll never spend a day in jail."

"Sometimes a mental hospital is worse than jail."

Gentry shrugged and went on out.

There was nothing more for Shayne to do. He followed the others outside and found Tim Rourke waiting for him. "Do you know everything that's happening in this town?" he asked the bony reporter.

"I'd better," Rourke answered, "I'm a newspaperman. How about

a drink?"

"So you can pump me for a story?"

"Cut it out, Mike," Rourke said sharply. "I'm just as sorry as you are that your client landed in this trouble."

Shayne sighed. "Sorry, Tim. It's just that there's something very cockeyed about this stinking business, and I can't put my finger on it. I'll take you up on your offer, though."

They found a bar not too far away that was suitably dark and quiet. When they were ensconced in a booth with drinks before them, Rourke said, "Look at it this way, Mike. Jill will probably wind up someplace where she can be helped. She'll be better off in the long run."

"Maybe."

"And you did everything you could to help her. She was the one who insisted that she was all right and wouldn't see a doctor."

Shayne took a big swallow of his drink. "Yeah. I can't help but wonder what Braddock said or did to set her off. She doesn't remember any of it, so we may never know."

"Yeah, it's a real pity about both of those kids," Rourke said. "At least, Taliaferro won't be able to dig his hooks any deeper into Jill now."

One of Shayne's hands knotted into a big rough-knuckled fist. He scowled. "I've got some scores

to settle with him someday."

Rourke gestured at the fist. "You go poking that into his face and you'll mess up his good looks for sure."

"That's the idea."

Rourke downed the last of his drink and stood up. "I think I'll go call the paper and find out if there's anything I ought to be doing. Order me another, okay?"

The reporter went across the room to the pay phone and dropped the coins in its slot. He talked briefly with the city editor of the *Miami Daily News*. When he returned to the booth, he found Shayne staring moodily into his glass. There were no fresh drinks on the table.

"Hey, what gives?" Rourke said. "I thought you were going to order another drink."

"Sorry," Shayne said. "I was just thinking." His left hand had gone to his earlobe.

"I heard some news from the paper," Rourke said. "One of the guys has a pretty good pipeline to the D.A.'s office, and word is that they're already moving on the Whittington case. Vince Taliaferro heard about it somehow and came forward to offer his testimony. He says Jill was erratic and often violent. That, coupled with your testimony and Jenkins', paints a pretty bad picture, Mike."

The hollows in Shayne's cheeks had deepened. "Sometimes pictures lie," he said.

"What's that mean?"

"Can you do some checking for me?"

"Sure. What's it about?"

"I don't think Jill Whittington killed Braddock."

IX

NIGHT HAD fallen in Miami, and a big moon was swimming in the sky overhead. The brilliant stars that surrounded it, were mirrored by the myriad lights of the city by the sea.

Mike Shayne had neither the time nor the inclination to admire the beauty of the night. He was on the trail of a killer, and that blotted everything else from his mind.

The car he was following turned in where he had expected it to, at the driveway of the Whittington estate. Shayne drove on past, parked the Buick with its still-broken window a few blocks away, then began to steal back on foot.

The trees and bushes that dotted the lawn gave him ample cover as he approached the house. A lighted window beckoned him. As he drew nearer, he realized that it was the study window. An appropriate meeting place for the real killers of Jeff Braddock, he mused grimly.

He crouched low, drawing his gun and moving underneath the bay window that was slightly ajar. He could hear the voices of the men inside, including the

one he had followed.

"I think we should drink a toast," Arthur Jenkins said. "A toast to ourselves!"

"The girl hasn't been put away yet," Vince Taliaferro snapped. "I'll wait until the money is in my hands to celebrate."

"But the outcome is a foregone conclusion," Jenkins insisted. "Jill will either be found guilty and sent to prison or be judged insane and sent to an institution. Either way, control of the trust fund will stay in my hands."

"And no one will ever know how much you stole from it."

"I always meant to replace the money," Jenkins replied, sounding irritated. "I just never had the opportunity to do so."

"You'd better be glad you came up with this scheme," Taliaferro said. "Otherwise, *you'd* be the one going to jail."

"Desperate men take desperate measures," Jenkins said practically.

"Except when they hire others to take them instead," a new voice put in.

"You'll be well paid, Forbes," Jenkins said. "After all, you *did* run most of the risks. It was *you* who drugged Jill all these months and *you* who pulled the trigger today. But it was *my* plan."

"And I thought it was a damn crazy one when you insisted we bring in Mike Shayne," Taliaferro said. "I've got to admit, though, that everything worked out just

like you said it would. He thought just what we wanted him to think all along. With his testimony against her, Jill doesn't stand a chance."

Outside, Mike Shayne had to grit his teeth to keep from roaring in anger as he listened. Only desire to overhear all the details he could kept him from going through the window right into the middle of the nest of murderers.

"You've got to admit we were lucky, though," Taliaferro went on, "what with Jill calling the Braddock boy herself today. That saved us the trouble of arranging it. He might not have been fooled again."

A door opened and a voice that was familiar, but strange at the same time, said, "What's this, a split-the-loot party?"

Shayne could not contain his curiosity. He raised his head enough to see into the room. The girl who had just entered was young and pretty and had honey-colored hair. Even though he knew it couldn't be, Shayne involuntarily thought for a second that it was Jill.

When he looked closer, though, he could tell that this girl was older, harder, than Jill. That was why she had gone to poorly lit discos and bars, why she had told him to leave the light off in his bedroom. That was the only way she could have carried off the impersonation.

"No, Annie, it will be a while

before everything is taken care of and you can get your money," Jenkins told her.

"As long as you make sure I get my share," Taliaferro growled.

"Don't worry, you will. All of you will."

All of it was wrapped up in a neat package that Shayne could drop on Will Gentry's desk. It was a slick frame-up, especially daring because it depended on the word of Miami's best-known private detective to help convict Jill. It would have been a dandy if it had worked.

Only Mike Shayne wasn't about to let it.

He gripped his gun tighter and got ready to stand up and get through the window in a rush. Before he could move, though, a flashlight snapped on and pinned him in a beam of light. A voice yelled, "*Hold it, Shayne!*"

The big redhead knew better than to look into the glare of the flashlight. He launched himself away from the window in a rolling dive. Shots rang out and bullets splatted against the side of the house where he had just been standing.

The light tried to track him, but when he landed, he snapped a shot in that direction, forcing whoever was wielding it to scuttle away.

Shayne came to his feet and ducked behind a tree. There were shouts coming from the house

now, and the sounds of more men joining the hunt. He should have known that Vince Taliaferro, with the latent paranoia of all criminals, would have men patrolling the grounds while he was there.

There was no way Shayne could avoid pursuit indefinitely. It would be only a matter of minutes before they cornered him. He had to use what little time he had.

Shayne slipped his gun back into its holster. It had been a hell of a long time since he had climbed a tree, but he thought it would come back to him. He wrapped his arms around the trunk and started up.

The racket he made climbing the tree sounded awfully loud to him, but no one seemed to notice. They were too busy running around with guns and flashlights. He kept going up until he was even with the second floor of the mansion.

The tree was close to the house, and one thick limb ran out to within a couple of feet of a window. Shayne moved along the limb gingerly, taking great care where he placed his feet, and then he was within leaping distance. He took a deep breath, lowered his shoulders and jumped.

The glass shattered with a loud crash as Shayne fell through into the room beyond. That would draw plenty of attention. Shayne picked himself up off the floor of the darkened room. There were some small cuts on his hands and

face from the flying glass, but no major damage had been done. He took his gun out and went to the door.

No one had gotten to the upstairs hall yet, but they would be on their way. There was a staircase at the far end, and Shayne headed for it in a run.

He took the stairs two at a time and was halfway down when Forbes suddenly appeared in the downstairs hall, carrying a pistol. The erstwhile butler threw the gun up and began firing.

Shayne squeezed off a single shot that took Forbes in the side and spun him around. His gun went clattering away.

Shayne reached the hall and jumped over the writhing moaning form of Forbes. He sprinted for the front of the house, trying to find the study from this unfamiliar angle.

A door ahead of him opened and Taliaferro stepped out, the girl right behind him. He was empty-handed, and surprise showed on his face when he saw Shayne. He tried to duck back.

Shayne's gun hand shot out and slapped the pistol against Taliaferro's temple. The girl screamed as the gangster folded up on the floor. Shayne glanced past her and saw Jenkins standing motionless in one corner of the study, his face as pale as death.

The front door slammed open and three of Taliaferro's men came skidding into the house,

guns drawn. They stopped in their tracks at the sight of Shayne holding his gun to their boss's head.

"Drop the guns," Shayne ordered, and there was no mistaking the menace in his voice. Three pistols hit the carpet.

Shayne crouched beside Taliaferro's unconscious form and told the girl, "Get on the other side of the hall." She obeyed quickly.

Shayne pulled Taliaferro away from the doorway. Motioning with his free hand, he told the three mobsters, "In there."

They trooped into the study to join Jenkins. Shayne slammed the door behind them, then picked up a chair sitting nearby and jammed it under the knob. He reached out and grabbed the girl's hand and said, "You're coming with me."

She wailed, "Oh, *no!*" but she had no choice but to follow him. She had to run hard to keep up.

There would not be enough time to get to the Buick, but there were several cars out front, and Shayne knew that many criminals left the keys in case they needed to leave in a hurry. Luckily, that was the case in the first one he checked, one of Taliaferro's Lincolns.

He thrust the girl into the front seat, then got behind the wheel. The engine turned right over, and he put it in gear and sent the car rocketing down the drive.

That door wouldn't hold Talia-

ferro's men for long. He had the girl now, though, and at least a chance for escape.

"It wasn't my ideal!" the girl was crying. "Why me?"

"Because you're the proof I need to save an innocent girl," Shayne said savagely. "Now dry up and answer my questions. Jenkins was behind all of it, wasn't he?"

"Yes. He stole money from the trust fund and had to cover it up. He promised Taliaferro a share if he would help him."

"And then he recruited you to impersonate Jill Whittington while Forbes had her drugged. That caused her blackouts. You established her violent behavior, and then they set her up for murder."

The girl nodded.

"You did a pretty good job," Shayne said, wheeling the car around a corner at high speed. There were headlights behind him now, coming up fast.

"You hadn't counted on me hitting you last night, though," Shayne went on. "I hit you hard enough to stun you, but when Jill came to my office this morning, there wasn't a mark on her."

The girl's fingers went involuntarily to the slight bruise on her chin.

"When I realized that, I knew someone had to be impersonating Jill and calling herself Annie. That's your real name, isn't it? You'd be sure to answer to it that way."

Shayne checked the following lights in the mirror and slid around another corner. He went on, "A friend of mine helped me figure out the motive behind it. Jenkins was in financial trouble last year, but he got out of it suddenly. The Whittington trust would be his easiest source of funds."

"What are you going to do now?"

"Give all this to the cops, if I can." The lights were close now.

"I'll deny all of it. I'll tell them you're crazy."

There was the spang of a bullet hitting the car, and the girl let out a short scream. "You'd better get down," Shayne said. "They don't care who they hit."

The girl crouched in the seat, and Shayne continued, "You'd better think twice. You're nothing but a potential danger to Jenkins and Taliaferro now. They'll want to cover their trail, and the best way to do that is to get rid of you."

Another bullet punched a hole in the back window. A straight stretch of road was coming up, and Shayne floored the accelerator. The car leaped ahead.

Shayne cursed as a slow-moving truck suddenly appeared in his lights. He swung out to pass it, but oncoming lights blazed up in front of him. He jerked the wheel back to the right and slammed on the brakes.

If the road were blocked, then they would have to leave the road. The parking lot of a suburban shopping center was just beyond the sidewalk. Shayne turned the wheel and sent the Lincoln bumping up over the curb.

As they went roaring across the lot, which was three-quarters empty at this time of night, he could see the pursuing car now in the rear-view mirror. The lot's large fluorescent lights illuminated the scene. It was the other Lincoln chasing them, and it was bristling with men and guns.

Shayne weaved in and out of the lanes of cars. The guns were still popping, and the center's customers were hitting the ground in fear. Shayne had to get out of there before one of them took a slug accidentally.

A station wagon, driven by a woman who was unaware of what was happening, began to back out in front of him. Shayne stood on the brakes, sending the car into a skid. There was no way to avoid the station wagon, but at least he got the speed down before the two vehicles slammed together.

The girl screamed and was thrown into the floorboards by the collision. Shayne's torso bounced off the steering wheel painfully.

The pursuing Lincoln screeched to a stop behind them. Taliaferro and his three men got out.

Shayne shook his head to clear

the cobwebs. The collision had canted the car sideways, and when Shayne saw Taliaferro and his men coming, he rolled out of the car and ducked down, using a crumpled fender for cover.

He heard someone yell, "Hold it!" and then a volley of shots rang out. Lead whined off the car. Shayne returned the fire cautiously. Two of Taliaferro's men dropped to the asphalt, wounded in the exchange.

Then the hammer of Shayne's gun clicked on an empty chamber.

Taliaferro stood up triumphant, his pistol aimed at Shayne's head.

Before he could fire, more shots exploded, and the gun fell from suddenly nerveless fingers. Taliaferro followed it to the ground in a heap, and Shayne saw for the first time the pair of shopping center security guards, both of whom held smoking pistols.

Both of whom looked ready to faint.

X

"THE WHITTINGTON girl's release is being processed right now," Will Gentry told Shayne an hour later. "When the D.A. got through talking to that girl you brought in, he didn't have much choice.

"When we brought that butler, Forbes, in and he admitted drug-ging Jill and putting the gun in her hand before he pulled the

trigger, that really tore the case up. Too bad Taliaferro bought it. I would have liked to see him in a courtroom."

"I'll settle for seeing him in hell," Shayne grunted. "What about Jenkins?"

"I just talked to the hospital. They don't think he'll make it. He tried to jerk the gun away from his head at the last second, they say, but he was too late." Gentry chewed his unlit cigar. "I'm wondering if Manny March was part of it."

"I don't think so," Shayne said. "I think it was a coincidence that he made his play when he did. They would have found *some* way for me to meet Annie if he hadn't, though." He scowled darkly at the thought of being used as he had been, then said, "Is it all right if I stick around here and take Jill home?"

"Sure, Mike. I've got some reports to make out, but you're welcome to hang around. Your cases sure do make a lot of paperwork for me."

Shayne grinned sourly. "Sorry about that, Will."

He sat down on one of the wooden benches that lined the corridor at Police Headquarters and lit a cigarette. The night had been a hectic one, and adrenalin was still pumping through his veins.

Tim Rourke hurried in and spotted Shayne. He came over to the redhead and said, "All right,

Mike, *now* you can give me the whole story for publication."

Shayne had spotted the head of honey-blond hair going down the corridor. He stood up and said, "Will can fill you in on the details, Tim."

"But what about *you*?"

"I've still got business to attend to."

He came up beside Jill Whittington and said, "Hi! Need a ride home?"

She turned to him with a weary smile. "Yes, I do, Mr. Shayne. Chief Gentry told me what you did for me. I don't know how to thank you."

"Call me Mike. And you don't owe me any thanks. If I'd been smarter sooner, there wouldn't have been nearly as much trouble."

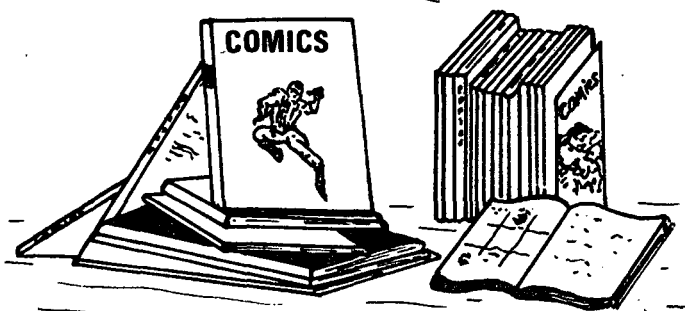
"Still," she put a soft hand on his arm, and lights were dancing in her blue eyes, "I intend to pay you."

"Well," Shayne said with a grin, "we can always discuss it on the way to your house."

He took her arm and they were moving down the hall when Rourke called out from behind them, "Hey, Mike, I forgot to tell you! Lucy called me. She got back in town early, and she was looking for you. She said to tell you she'd wait for you at your place."

Now Shayne knew what they meant by the old saying about a rock and a hard place!

Happy Ending



by **BEN SATTERFIELD**

There Is Seldom Anything Funny About Murder — But Sarah Watkins' Slaying Had Its Comic Angle.

SNOWCROFT LIKED to drive fast. "I always move it when there's a murder," he said, knowing he had the best excuse possible.

Ritter braced one arm against the dashboard and smiled. "You never let a corpse get away, I bet."

"Not gonna let this one either." Snowcroft braked suddenly and wheeled onto a clean tree-lined street, making the turn with only a slight squeal of tires. "We're on the spot."

Ritter saw a patrol car parked at the curb in front of a small frame house on the corner. Neighbors, those sentinels of misfor-

tune, were milling about on the sidewalk on both sides of the street. "Like flies around a cow's nose," Snowcroft muttered.

"Those people pay our salaries," Ritter said, "and right now they want to see us earn them. Pull in."

They turned into the driveway and saw a uniformed policeman at the rear of the house quickly shove a comic book he had been reading out of sight.

"Think he's studying for the sergeant's exam?" Ritter quipped, hooking his ID onto the breast pocket of his coat.

They got out of the car and looked around. The grass had

been recently mowed, edged and watered. The shrubbery was trimmed and healthy. The house, like everything around it, looked more than well-kept. It looked loved. The walkway to the front door was bordered with a dozen varieties of flowers in clumps like pieces of a crumbled rainbow.

Another uniformed officer, whose nameplate read *Petrusek*, met them at the door. He was young and nervous and looked pale. "I'm glad you guys are here," he said, then added respectfully, nodding at Ritter, "Lieutenant."

"Your partner isn't," Ritter said. "We interrupted his self-improvement program."

Petrusek looked confused. "He said he was going to stand by the back door while I stayed here with the —"

"He's there all right, letting the taxpayers see how well their money's spent. Where's the body?"

"Behind the sofa. Name's Sarah Watkins, a widow — lived alone."

Used as a boundary for a dining area behind it, the sofa was in the middle of the room, facing the front door and a color television set that took up most of the space between the door and the window. From the ceiling in front of the window hung a planter basket with luxuriant ivy dripping yards of green trail.

In the corner was a bird cage suspended by a macrame rope above a small walnut table holding a glass bowl with two live goldfish in it. Curled languidly beneath the table, a Burmese cat looked at the policemen with depthless golden eyes, then rested its head on its paws as if bored.

"Except for a slew of animals," Petrusek added.

The body belonged to a frail elderly woman who could have been any age between seventy and ninety. She lay partially against the back of the sofa, her legs bent in what would have been a very uncomfortable position for a live person. She wore a short-sleeved print house dress with a cameo brooch pinned to the top. Ritter noticed a patch of dried blood on her scalp and more of it on her face. He lifted her arm, checking temperature and resilience, and let it drop. It was still limber.

"Call the M.E. and get the forensics wagon down here," he said to Snowcroft, who was halfway out of the room before Ritter turned to Petrusek. "Who found the body?"

"A neighbor across the street — Mrs. Winkleman." He swallowed. "She's — uh — she's in the bathroom."

Ritter stood up, frowning at the young officer, who seemed to be growing paler by the minute.

"I know, I know," Petrusek said, his voice beginning to whine.

"I shouldn't have, but she's an old lady and she was upset."

Ritter sighed and looked around the room. "You touch anything?"

The kid brightened. "Oh, no sir, not a thing. We were all very careful."

"All?"

"I mean my partner Harris too."

"Oh, I thought you might have meant the entire neighborhood. A picture flashed through my mind of you conducting a tour through here."

Some color visited the kid's cheeks but didn't move in. "I think Harris already sent for the lab boys," he mumbled, looking away as if talking to himself.

Ritter walked into the open front bedroom and looked around. Everything was orderly. The bed was made and a woman's imitation leather purse lay on top of it near the edge. With one finger he lifted the cover flap and opened the mouth of the purse wide enough to see its contents—to see that it contained money.

The back bedroom door was pushed to the casing, but not closed. Ritter nudged it open with his foot. It was a child's room, a cubed anachronism with a faded 48-star flag and huge bleached posters of Flash Gordon and Captain Midnight on the walls, a single bed with a patchwork quilt cover, a chifforobe with a framed black and white picture of Gene Autry on top, a pair of empty

painted shelves under the window, a small desk opposite the bed with two P-38 model airplanes, a toy pistol, a tube of Koloid cement, some pencils, a battalion of lead soldiers, and school notebook dated 1942 on it.

He went back to the living room but before he could ask Petrusek about the room, the bathroom door opened and a white-haired woman hobbled out with a cane. "I found her," she said, looking up at Ritter from her stood like a turtle from its shell. "I'm Lottie Winkleman, she was dead, and I called the police straightaway."

"Very good. I'm Lieutenant Ritter, and the big fellow coming in the door is Sergeant Snowcroft."

"Snowcroft," she said, studying the name and the man. "You have any people in St. Louis?"

"No ma'am, I don't believe so." He gave Ritter a quizzical look.

"I went to school with a Doris Snowcroft. Be thankful you're not related. That woman was a bitch."

Ritter grinned.

"I called the police right away. I was rattled, of course, and used this phone without thinking—but I didn't touch anything else. I knew you'd be dusting for prints and I didn't want to mess up your evidence." She hobbled past the three men and sat down in an overstuffed armchair with anti-macassars on it.

"Don't worry, Mrs. Winkleman," Ritter said, "we almost never get any prints off a phone that tell us anything. Even the clumsiest killer will wipe—"

She thumped her cane against the floor and Ritter stopped. "I came over at five o'clock." She lifted a pendant watch that hung from her neck by a slender gold chain and peered at it through bifocals. "Thirty-seven minutes ago. You see, I was going to help her with dinner. Every Friday night we play bridge with some other ladies and it was Sarah's turn as hostess, but if I don't help her with the food, she always forgets something."

"Yes, ma'am," Ritter said. "I wonder if you could —"

"She was a good cook, mind you, but just forgetful. I wasn't criticizing."

"I didn't think you were," Ritter said.

"Oh my, I just remembered, I've got to call the other ladies and let them know."

"Did you see anyone going in or out of here before you came over?"

"There was the laundry man. Always comes on Friday. He left about 4:30, I think. Yes, I know it was because I went inside then to check on my soup. I had a pot of split pea soup cooking."

"So between 4:30 and 5:00 o'clock, you don't know whether anyone was here or not?"

"No, I was inside tending to my soup. The last thing I saw leave

was the truck."

Ritter nodded to Snowcroft, who left to talk to the neighbors.

The old woman pursed her lips and stared at the floor pensively. "Now that's odd."

"What?"

"That I didn't see him come out. I live in the house cater-cornered across the street, so I can see this front door clearly. I was on the porch and saw the truck back into the driveway, saw the young man take a dry cleaning bag into the house. Ten or fifteen minutes later, he drove out and away."

"Do you know the name of—"

"All-American Cleaners. I don't use them myself. They charge too much."

"Anyone else?" Ritter decided to make his questions as short as possible.

"The lawn service people were here from about three to four. I knew that would nettle Sarah, because she likes the grass cut and the watering done early in the day. But it's so difficult these days to get service when you ask for it. I told Sarah she ought to—"

"Mrs. Winkleman, I see the truck from our Forensics Laboratory has just pulled up. The Medical Examiner will be here soon also, and I think it would be a good idea for us to —"

"Say no more, I'm ready to leave." She thumped her cane on the floor twice and pushed herself up.

"Before we go, can you tell us if you notice anything out of place."

"Not a stick."

"Or if anything's missing?"

"Nothing. I've been in this house a thousand times and it's as familiar as my own. I know you're looking for a motive, but Sarah didn't keep money in the house and didn't own any jewelry worth stealing, much less worth killing for."

Petrusek opened the front door for her, but Mrs. Winkleman stopped to shake her cane at the television set as though putting a curse on it. The TV was a console model in a pecan veneer case, and vase of fresh flowers centered upon a white doily rested on top of it.

"That's the most valuable thing she owned. Bought it last summer, paid nearly a thousand dollars for it, which I thought was outrageous. I tried to talk her out of it, but she wouldn't listen to reason. She had a deaf side to her nature. I'm not criticizing, just telling the truth."

"Some people called her stubborn, others said she was daft, but she wasn't. Like everybody else, she had her good and bad points, but there *were* blind spots and deaf spots and that's all there is to it."

They walked past the police truck, and Ritter nodded to the pair of lab men as they unloaded.

"If she could afford such an expensive set—"

"I know what you're thinking, but she didn't have a lot of money. She had some stocks her father left her, but nothing grand."

"She was a widow?" Ritter made it a question just so he could finish a sentence. As they crossed the street, he noticed more people were outside. They were now collecting in groups, huddling together and talking softly.

"I see what you mean. You think maybe her husband left her well-off. No, he got killed in the war thirty-five years ago. She got something from the government, but not nearly enough for the grief she had to bear, I'll tell you."

"That woman suffered, there's no doubt about it. Oh, she managed all right, but she wasn't rich and she never carried more than fifty dollars on her, so whoever killed her didn't do it for money."

"Then why?"

Mrs. Winkleman stopped and stared at him with tears in her eyes. "*Maniac!*" she cried, hitting her cane against the bottom step of her front porch. "It's a damn *maniac!*"

Ritter took her elbow and helped her up the steps to a rocking chair on the porch. She dabbed at her eyes with a tissue she had been holding in her left hand, then began rocking slowly.

"She had a son, born in 1929,

the year of the Big Crash. She used to say he was the only good thing that happened that year. Her father was in the government, so they got along all right. He was Jim Donahue, ever hear of him?"

Ritter shook his head.

"He was a WPA man, and later some kind of bureau chief in Washington. Sarah was his only child and so James — that was her son's name — was his only grandchild, and he made sure they were provided for. So you know she lived well in the 30's."

Ritter nodded.

"Not fancy, but well. The war came along, big Jim had a heart attack — only sixty-three but overweight. Died pruning a rose bush, fell over it, had scratches all over his face and chest. Then her husband joined the Army. He was overseas when James drowned. Thirteen years, a tragedy. Losing her son and her father the same year did something to Sarah, she was never the same."

"How?" Ritter said quickly.

"She developed a blind side and a deaf side, what I was telling you about. Then her husband got killed in the Normandy invasion, and that clinched it."

"What?"

"Something happened in her mind. She began to blot things out. She'd talk about her father, her son and her husband as if they were still living. You saw the boy's room, didn't you? Everything in

it just like it was when he was alive. It's a little eerie, I think, but I never said anything to her about it.

"I can understand how she'd want to hold on to something. And she kept the door closed usually, so it wasn't like she was trying to show it off to everyone. If she knew you real well or took a liking to you, she'd show you the room, but she had to trust you."

"Mrs. Winkleman, I want to thank you —"

"No need for that."

"You've been a great help."

She stopped rocking and looked at him intently. "Do you think you can find who killed her?"

"We'll do our best."

She grunted. "I hope that's good enough."

When Ritter got back to the Watkins house, the Medical Examiner was on his way out. "Cause of death — fractured skull," he said, pausing at the door and knocking an ash off his cigar, black bag in hand. He was a short pudgy man with a red face and tightly curled black hair, which he combed straight back. He wore a dark rumpled suit and a loosened tie with a large stain in the center. "Possibly a broken neck. Somebody hit her real hard."

"When?"

"Hard to say exactly. Shock has a funny effect on rigor mortis."

"I didn't know that. Was she shocked?"

"Greatest shock of all, the big D." The doctor chuckled, his belly quivering under his gray shirt.

Ritter glared at him. "What else can you tell me, other than she wasn't hit by a truck?"

"Want me to give you the name and address of the killer?"

"I don't expect quite so much help, so I'd be satisfied if you could nail down the T.O.D."

"An hour." He pulled the corners of his mouth down and shrugged, holding out the bag in one hand and his cigar in the other. "Two at the most. The autopsy'll tell us more. She wasn't raped, though. The only poke she took was from a fist."

"That was enough."

"Yeah, she was old — I'd say about eighty. One solid punch and slugger had given her the big D."

"You're developing a graveyard humor."

The M.E. shrugged again. "Occupational hazard."

"Would you like to hear about the hazard of my occupation?"

"Uremic poisoning, I imagine, from drinking so much coffee."

"No, that's not it."

"He stuck the cigar in his mouth and looked at his watch. "You aren't going to tell me that if you don't bust this case, you'll be writing parking tickets?"

"No, the real hazard is in exposure."

The M.E. looked at him, then shook his head slowly and puffed on the cigar. "Yeah, well, we all get that."

"No, I don't mean murder and mayhem, I'm accustomed to the grim realities. I mean a different kind of exposure, one that's more disgusting and harder to take."

"What's that?"

"Exposure to assholes like you."

SNOWCROFT STAYED within the speed limit. He glanced several times at Ritter, who was staring straight ahead and rubbing his jaw.

"You shouldn't've said that to the M.E."

Ritter didn't answer.

"Not that he didn't have it coming. I'm with you. But he'll make waves sure as the Queen Mary, and we have to work with those guys. You know how the chief is about good relations."

"Forget that. If there's any flak, I'll say the M.E. was being crude and insensitive — *unprofessional*. That'll burn his cookies. Did you hear his findings? 'Fractured skull, *maybe* a broken neck.' That's sloppy. He might as well've said she didn't die in bed for all the help he was."

"What got to you?"

"Sarah Watkins, little old lady, kept a neat house, loved flowers and living things. Harmless, defenseless, alone. Somebody, for some reason — or maybe no

reason — snuffs out the tiny bit of life she has left. Then that chubby runt of an M.E. makes jokes.”

“It’s a defense mechanism.”

“With him, I’m not so sure. Anyway, forget it. If he tries to make trouble, I’ll find a way to push his little nuts in the wringer.”

Snowcroft nodded. “Yeah, you probably will.”

They stopped in front of the All-American cleaners and Laundry, whose double doors were wide open. Inside, a henna-haired woman was complaining about the cost of cleaning a chartreuse pantsuit and a violet skirt. She was wearing a beltless lemon-yellow dress that Ritter estimated to be a size 12, smoke-gray hose, black low-heeled shoes and magenta lipstick.

“It’s criminal to charge so much, it’s just *criminal!*” She snatched her clothes by the hangers and huffed out, the polythene bag trailing in her wake.

The clerk, a thin hollow-chested man with rimless glasses and a weak chin, let his breath out in a huge sigh and slumped his shoulders to indicate how put-upon he felt. Then he took a deep breath, adjusted his clip-on bow tie and tried to smile, but didn’t quite manage it.

“Can I help you?” he said, sounding as though he hoped to hell not.

Snowcroft took a leather packet from his coat and held it open so the clerk could see his shield and identification card. “I’m Sergeant Snowcroft and this is Lieutenant Ritter,” he said. “Homicide.”

“*Homicide!*” the clerk said, then smiled genuinely as if the prospect of someone he knew being in serious trouble delighted him. “I’m Edwin Sayre, the assistant manager — at your service.”

“We just need some information,” Ritter said. The man looked disappointed.

“How many delivery trucks are out?” Snowcroft asked.

“None. We deliver between nine and five only. The drivers come to work at eight-thirty and leave at five-thirty — and believe me, they don’t work a minute overtime.”

Snowcroft showed him a piece of paper with the name and address of Sarah Watkins on it. “We’d like to talk to the driver who delivered some cleaning to this customer today.”

“He’s not here. Like I said, the delivery men leave at five-thirty.”

Ritter and Snowcroft just stared at the man, who looked back and forth between them a few times, then opened his mouth wide, making a smacking sound. “Oh, I see — you want his home address.”

They nodded.

“Well, I’ll have to get that from the office.”

He indicated a small unlit room

behind him with windows on three sides. "Be right back."

Five minutes later, he returned with a man's name, telephone number, date of birth, and address on a three-by-five card, which he gave to Snowcroft. "Sorry to be so long, but I'm not totally familiar with the way the records are kept."

Snowcroft looked at the card. "How long has this Harold Crume worked here?"

The assistant manager smiled. "I figured you'd want to know that, so I checked. Nine months. What did he do, kill somebody?"

"Why do you say that?" Ritter asked casually.

"Come on, you're from Homicide. You must be investigating a murder."

"Mr. Sayre, what time do you close?" Snowcroft asked.

"Nine-o'clock. We stay open late on Fridays. Why?"

"We may be back."

"If so, make sure it's before nine — I close up sharply."

Ritter called for a check on Harold Crume, not expecting anything, and was informed that he had no yellow sheet, but had been arrested several times as a juvenile. No record was available.

"That doesn't mean anything," Snowcroft said. "I got in trouble myself as a kid."

"Not me," Ritter said. "I was a veritable angel."

"I'll bet!"

"Never got caught, anyhow."

Isn't that what *veritable* means?"

Snowcroft pulled into the parking lot of a large apartment complex. All the buildings were identical and painted the same color, desert sand. "What's the number?"

"One-six-two. You're in luck, no stairs."

"Speaking of luck, I hope we get something here, otherwise we're back to GO, and that's nowhere."

When the door to apartment 162 opened, Snowcroft presented his identification and asked Crume, who seemed surprised, if they could come in and talk.

"Yeah, I — uh, — sure," Crume said, backing away from the door. He was of average height and stocky, with small dark eyes and thick brown hair that covered his ears. His nose turned up at the tip and his mouth was set in an unhappy cast, as though he fully expected the worst from life, but could never get used to receiving it.

He wore faded jeans, a T-shirt with the Superman triangle S insignia on it, and tennis shoes. A portable television set was blaring, and he turned it off with a slap of his hand. Four empty beer cans stood on a coffee table in front of a worn chesterfield that sagged in the middle. On the wall above the sofa, a huge painting of The Incredible Hulk stared intensely at them.

"You delivered some dry clean-

ing to Mrs. Sarah Watkins this afternoon," Snowcroft said.

"Yeah, a coupla dresses, sure. Why?"

"What time did you leave her house?"

"About four-thirty, why?"

"Four-thirty," Snowcroft repeated. "You're sure of the time?"

"Yeah, it was my last stop."

"How was Mrs. Watkins?" Ritter asked.

"Fine."

"She wasn't fine when we saw her."

"Whatta you tellin' me?"

"She was dead. Murdered."

Crume looked at Ritter, then at Snowcroft. "What — uh — I mean, what's it got to do with me?"

"You were the last person known to see Mrs. Watkins alive."

"Hey, anybody coulda done it, I just deliver clothes." He backed up a step and shoved his hands in his pockets. "Driving a company truck puts me in plain view — sure, people're gonna see me."

"You haven't been in trouble for a long time," Ritter said.

"What's that mean?"

"As an adult, you've kept clean."

"Crume's eyes were as hard as a boxer's fist. He stood perfectly still, as though fighting to contain some inner rage. "You can't use that juvenile stuff. Furthermore, the record was supposed to be

expunged, that's what the judge said."

"It's sealed, but not expunged," Ritter said.

"And seals can be broken, right? Okay, so what?"

Ritter smiled. "Nothing."

"Why bring it up, then?"

"I merely observed that you haven't been in trouble for a long time."

"I ain't in trouble now. Whatta you think, I'm *due*? Is that how you guys operate? Look, if somebody knocked off the old lady, they'd want to sneak in and out, not drive up the front door in a truck with their name on it. Didn't you think of that?"

Ritter and Snowcroft looked at him and said nothing.

"Whatta you want from *me*? She was alive when I left, that's all I can say."

"You don't know why someone might've wanted to kill her?" Ritter asked.

"No, why should I?"

Ritter stared at the man. "You spending the evening here?"

"Yeah, sure. Why?"

"We'll want a statement, need your signature."

They walked silently back to the car. Inside, Ritter leaned back against the headrest and closed his eyes. "What do you think?"

"I don't know," Snowcroft said, keying the ignition. "The

guy's defensive, doesn't like cops — but I didn't smell anything. Did you?"

"Hard to say. My Geiger counter was singing, but that might be because the guy's got a lump of hostility in him that radiates like nuclear waste."

"He's got big hands too, but his knuckles weren't skinned or bruised that I could see. 'Course he could've wrapped his fist . . . what was that about a statement?"

"Just wanted to let him know we might be back."

Snowcroft started the engine. "Where to now?"

"Let's go get some clues."

"You know it's after seven?"

"You're hungry, huh?"

"I know you lose your appetite when you're busy, but I get a headache if I don't eat."

"Tell you what," Ritter said, "we'll eat as soon as we knock this case."

"Oh boy, here comes a migraine!"

THE LAB MEN were wrapping up when Ritter and Snowcroft got back to the Watkins house. A chalk outline was on the floor instead of the body.

"She was struck here," the forensics expert said, standing between the two bedroom doors. His name was Nelson, he was very thin and blinked his eyes a lot.

"Apparently with a lot of force. Her head hit right here —" He indicated a spot on the wall.

"There's a slight indentation and we found some hair. She crumpled to the floor and was dragged behind the sofa. No sign of a struggle. All the prints we picked up seem to be the same, except for the front door and the bathroom doorknob."

"Anything unusual?"

"The kitchen doorknob on the inside was clean, somebody wiped it."

"What's it look like to you?"

"Well, no sign of forcible entry, so I'd say she opened the door to whoever killed her."

"Then it was probably someone she knew, but someone who didn't want to leave prints."

"Not much, is it?"

"Thanks." Ritter walked into the kitchen and looked around. Then he went back into the living room, trying to force his eyes into seeing something that had been overlooked. He went into the front bedroom, then into the child's room.

"Nelson!" he yelled, and the thin man scurried into the room, followed by Snowcroft. "Where did that come from?" Ritter asked, pointing to a comic book on the floor.

"Oh, *that*. One of the uniformed men had been looking at it."

"Why'd he leave it here?"

"Said it belonged here."

"I hope he knows where he belongs, because it sure isn't on the force." Ritter took a deep breath and scanned the room slowly. "Get Mrs. Winkleman," he said to Snowcroft, who nodded and left. Nelson frowned. "Did we miss something?"

"No, you did fine," Ritter said, and sat down on the bed. "Just fine!"

He was still sitting there fifteen minutes later when Snowcroft returned with Mrs. Winkleman. He stood up to greet her.

"What in the world is it? I've got a houseful of upset ladies to tend to, and you must know this is not a pleasure coming over here."

"I understand, and I only want a moment of your time. Now, look around this room carefully . . . and tell me if you see anything."

"What do you mean, *see anything*?"

"Please, Mrs. Winkleman, just do it." He stepped to her side. "Carefully. Take your time."

"I don't have to waste time, I already see what you're after. The shelves are empty. Everything else is the same."

"What —"

"I would've noticed it before, but I didn't come in this room. As I recall, the door was shut."

"Yes ma'am," Ritter said. "What was on the shelves?"

"His comic books, they were stacked up there by the dozen. Trashy things, I would've thrown

them out, but Sarah kept everything just like it was —"

"Thank you, Mrs. Winkleman," Ritter said, rubbing his hands together. "Ver-ry much. I won't take any more of your time. Sergeant Snowcroft will see you home."

"Is that all?"

"Yes ma'am, you've been a great help."

"*Comic books!* I hope you know what you're doing." She turned and started out. "I sure don't. A waste of time if you ask me."

"I'm glad you made it back before nine," the assistant manager said and showed his teeth. "What can I do for you this time?"

"You keep records of all deliveries, don't you, Mr. Sayre?" Ritter asked.

"Certainly."

"And the drivers keep records of where they go — and when?"

"It works like this, Lieutenant — we give the drivers batches to be delivered, and they work out a travel route."

"And you keep a copy of these routes?"

"Well, they're more like work sheets, but we have them, yes."

"We'd like to see Crume's route sheet for this afternoon."

"Whatever for?"

"Could we see it, please?"

"I suppose so. That is, I don't see why not." He went into the

office and came back with a clipboard, from which he took a green sheet of paper containing a list of names, addresses, abbreviations and check marks. He handed the list to Ritter.

"I never liked Crume," he said. "Wouldn't surprise me if he did something bad. He's surly, and doesn't like taking orders."

"Mr. Sayre, we'd like to keep this for a while. If you need the record, we'll make a photocopy for you."

"I suppose you'd better, just in case." He looked at Ritter and sighed. "You aren't goin' to tell me anything, are you?"

CRUME OPENED the door. "You guys again."

"We're kind of in a hurry," Ritter said, pushing the door all the way open. Crume backed up and glowered at them. "You see, Sergeant Snowcroft gets a headache when he doesn't eat, and he hasn't had dinner yet."

"So go eat," Crume said.

"I told him we'd do that after we got our killer. As a matter of fact, I'm getting hungry, too."

"So whatta you doin' here?"

Ritter smiled. Snowcroft closed the door and stood in front of it.

"Hey, what is this?"

Ritter pointed to the painting behind the sofa. "The Hulk, that's a comic book character, isn't it?"

"Yeah."

"One of your favorites, huh?"

"Hey, look, what is this?"

"You like comics, don't you, Harold?"

"So what?"

"So Mrs. Watkins had a lot of them. I say *had*. You know what happened to them?"

"No, why should I?"

Ritter stared at the man. "You tell me."

"I ain't tellin' you nothin'."

"All right." Ritter reached inside his coat and withdrew a copy of *Action Comics* from the inside pocket. "You left this one behind."

"Never saw it before."

"You never saw it? Is that why you left it?"

"I mean I don't know nothin' about it. You guys leave me alone."

Ritter shook his head. "You know we can't do that, Harold."

"You tryin' to prove somethin' from a comic book?" He put his hands in his pockets, then took them out and laced his fingers together, squeezing tightly.

"That's just a start. Why'd you back your truck in at the Watkins house?"

"I do that a lot, it's easier to get back on the street."

"But you don't often go in the front door and come out the back, do you?"

Crume's head jerked up and his small eyes widened. The blood drained from his face and he

began to tremble. His mouth opened, then closed firmly.

"Premeditated murder," Ritter said, taking out Crume's route slip and showing it to him. "You've got Mrs. Watkins down as your third stop, and according to the city map that's logical. But you didn't make that third stop, even though you had a delivery two streets over."

"I forgot," Crume said, his voice quaking. "I made a mistake."

"I couldn't agree more. You went to the Watkins house last because you planned to kill her and take the comics. Which you did. You left by the back door because you didn't want to see anyone taking the books out."

"Just in case, you wiped the kitchen doorknob clean. Then you drove here, dropped the comics off and went back to your office, arriving there at five-twenty. You turned in your slips and checked out."

"What happens now?" Crume asked.

Snowcroft took a card from his pocket and began reading the Miranda warning. When he finished, Ritter said, "The comics, where are they?"

Crume trudged into the bedroom, Ritter behind him, and pulled a cardboard box from beneath the unmade bed. He opened it up to show comic books from the late 30's and early 40's.

"Look at this," he said, taking

one out to show Ritter. "*Detective Comics*, May nineteen-thirty-nine, the first time Batman appeared. D'you know how much this alone is worth?" He didn't wait for an answer. "And they're all in mint condition, look: *Superman*, *Green Lantern*, *Captain Marvel* — they're worth thousands, today!"

"But not worth a life."

"The old lady, she didn't know anythin' about how valuable they are. I offered to buy 'em, but she wouldn't sell, said they were her son's — she was looney."

"Yeah, and what're you?"

"She didn't know anythin' about value," Crume whimpered, and seemed to shiver with gall. "They were no good to her — what did she care about 'em?"

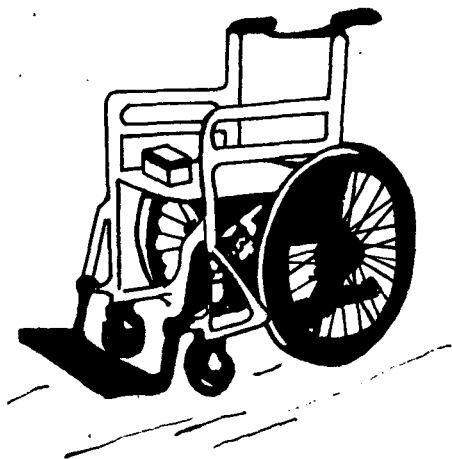
"Too much."

Crume dropped the comic book and slouched as if an oppressive weight were bearing down on him. "I guess I shoulda known better," he sniveled, feeling sorry for himself, a perennial victim of bad luck. "No matter what, nothin' good ever happens to me."

"It's a rotten world." Ritter handcuffed Crume and ushered him out of the room, then went back for the box of comics. "Let's go," he said, and Snowcroft opened the door, taking the prisoner by the arm. "Well, it looks like I won't get a migraine after all."

"I love happy endings," Ritter said.

Going Away Present



by TOM MCBRIDE

A Crippled Husband Plots His Wife's Murder to Perfection.
The Only Problem Is — Who's Doing What to Whom . . .

HE SHOVED the remains of breakfast into the middle of the table and wheeled himself over to the floor lamp. He grabbed the heavy brass shaft in one beefy hand and hammered the lamp on the floor until he heard her footsteps start up the stairs.

"How many times have I told you not to do that?" his wife shouted. She glared at him, her bony little fists on her hips, while her face turned so red the

freckles disappeared. "You know I come get your things as soon as I get the hired hands fed."

He snorted. *Mighty sweet to the hired hands, ain't you*, he thought, *especially the young ones*. As she marched out with the dishes in an unsteady stack, he said in a perfect imitation of her whinny, "How many times have I told you not to do that?"

Her body jerked as if she had touched a hot wire and she

snatched for the teetering cup, but she didn't look back.

She was used to it. When he first started doing it, just as a joke to put off her quick temper, she would goggle at him with her green eyes as if she had heard a ghost. Later he learned to wait until she thought she had escaped his bitterness before hurling her ersatz voice like a poisoned spear. Oh well, he wouldn't need it much longer.

He rolled himself toward the window, pausing to dart his hand between the mattresses for a plug of chewing tobacco. The familiar smells and sounds of cattle drifted into the room, and in the distance on the rust-colored Texas plain he could see a cluster of oil wells pumping away, pumping dollars into his bank account, the big counterweights bobbing up and down like huge prehistoric birds pecking the life from the land.

The kitchen door slammed beneath him and his wife came into sight, headed toward the ramshackle garage almost at a trot, her shoulder bag swinging like a pendulum.

She was right on schedule for her Tuesday rounds of gossip gathering. He took a big bite from the plug and worked it back to his jaw. How she hated for him to chew tobacco! The sight of one of the old coffee cans that he used for spittoons was enough to set off a good half-hour of

shrieking. As if that could make him quit after half a century.

The bright yellow Cadillac glided beneath the window while she looked warily up at him. He waved, at the same time losing a fat brown stream from his pursed lips. She gunned the car to avoid it, but the wind blew it back against the house anyhow. He cursed and tried to stand up to see the damage, but his legs flopped beneath him like two loose springs. He sat back and watched the plume of dust spurting down the ranch road toward the highway.

HE LOCKED the wheelchair so it couldn't roll and took hold of the leg of the windmill, pulling himself up hand-over-hand until he was clear of the seat. Then he swung himself to the side and lowered himself until he was seated beside the wheelchair.

He paused to catch his breath. Not bad for a man pushing 70, he encouraged himself. He rolled onto his stomach and began to crawl, twisting his powerful torso to drive his elbows forward, slithering through the dust like a huge snake while his legs trailed limply behind.

Once those legs had been able to straddle a horse all day and still perform the nimblest steps of any cowboy at the Saturday night dance. That was how he met his second wife, after he danced down all the other gals.

Later when they got serious he told everyone he liked 'em tough as boot leather outside and tender inside.

He would have done anything for her and did. He even tried to show her what bulldogging was all about, long after he knew tricks like that were for men more her age than his. Then, somehow, when he wrenched its head around his feet got tangled up and it came down half across his back and he heard more than felt his back snap. Well, paralyzed or not, he wasn't going to hang back like some old steer while the young bulls romped in his pasture.

He slithered head first down the stairs of the tornado shelter. The door was ajar in its rotting frame. No one used it any more. Tornado warnings on television were so reliable there was always plenty of time to get to the community shelter in Dalton. Besides, everybody was afraid of the rattlesnakes that came there to escape the sun.

He had lived among the rattlesnakes all his life and never had any trouble. Just make a little noise, a little bang, and they'll get out of your way, he always said. He slapped the earth floor with both hands and something moved away in the dimly lit shelter. He didn't know or care what it was, just as long as it stayed away from him.

On a shelf near the door was a big metal box. He took a key

from his shirt pocket and unlocked it. Inside were a few sticks of dynamite, still hard and smooth, and a handful of blasting caps. He took one of the caps and measured off a piece of dynamite with it. It didn't need to be big.

By the time he got back inside the house he was sweating freely, but he didn't have time to stop for a glass of water. He rolled into the lift. It jerked and shuddered before it carried him upward. For a few months after it was installed it worked perfectly, but then it became so uncertain that no one would use it except him, who had to. *Like everything nowadays*, he told himself, *looks pretty but no good*.

He went into the bedroom to tuck the dynamite and cap beneath the mattress beside his cache of chewing tobacco. Funny how she never found it. She threw away any he ordered from the store, but she never found the plugs his friends brought him.

At the old telephone table in the hallway he dialed the Dalton *Courier*. He asked for the society editor in his wife's voice and began breathlessly telling all the gossip she had recited to him since last week's paper. The call was a weekly ritual for his wife and the society editor. And when he let his voice wind down, he knew the question that always ended the calls after listening to his wife's end so many times.

"Why, he's just fine. He's the

bravest man you've ever seen," he whinnied. "But you know, he's going to see some new doctors out in California that can sew nerves together. You call it premonition or whatever, but I just know his misery is going to end soon."

He ended the call just in time. The kitchen door slammed and her footsteps came up the stairs. She put the big shoulder bag on the floor and reached for the phone.

"No need to do that," he said. "She called and said her column was all filled up for this week. Big reunion or something."

"I wonder whose," she said. "I haven't heard a thing about it."

"No telling, probably somebody way over by the county line. Anyhow, I wanted you to drive me around the ranch since I won't be seeing it for a while."

"You're sweating. What have you been doing to get so hot?" she asked.

"Just sitting in this hotbox. Come on, we'll stir up a breeze in the car."

"You ought not to be so hard-headed about the air conditioning. Then you wouldn't have to sit around sweating."

"I'd rather roast alive than sit under an air conditioner."

"That's just like you, the hardest-headed old man in Texas. It's like you and that chewing tobacco," she said, her face reddening. She jerked the wheelchair around savagely and shoved

him toward the lift. "And don't think I didn't see you spitting that disgusting blob this morning..."

He folded his hands in his lap and bowed his head so she wouldn't see his mean little smile as her voice rained down on him.

The flight to Dallas on the little commuter plane was so bouncy that his wife gripped the arms of her seat and turned pale, making her freckles stand out. He kept busy trying to remember if he had left anything out. He had called the insurance company and asked questions in her voice that wouldn't seem so innocent later. He had called the airline in Dallas and asked about getting help for her husband in Los Angeles, mentioning in his wife's breathless manner that he would be carrying a little going away present from her. The pliers and the rest of the wire were beneath the seat of her car. A few crumbs of dynamite and the electrician's tape were in the garage.

If things worked out right, the police would get her before it went off. If they were a little slow, her legs would be blown off, about chest high. Either way he would be rid of her.

When she rolled him down the commuter ramp into the Dallas airport he looked around and sighed in relief. Nothing had changed. It was the one weak link in the airport's security.

People arriving on a commuter flight could board an airliner directly without having their hand luggage searched.

"I believe you're as glad to get off that awful puddlejumper as I am," she was saying.

"You betcha," he said. "All I could think about was how I wished I had a chew."

"You might as well forget about that. I doubt if they've even heard of chewing tobacco in California."

He closed his eyes as she pushed him down the long corridor, the big shoulder bag flopping at her side. He could name the gates by memory, he had been through the terminal so many times since the accident, searching for the one doctor who could offer him more than hope.

His gate was almost at the other end of the corridor and she was panting when they got there. "You're getting soft," he said.

"Sez you."

"How much time we got?"

"Not enough. It's only fifteen minutes till your flight loads."

"You are getting soft. Once you could have danced down there and back twice in that time."

"All right," she sighed. "You want the usual?"

He handed her a twenty. "Have one yourself. You've got to make the flight back."

It was part of their airport ritual. He didn't like crowds anymore, so she would go to the

bar, order a triple tequila with a slice of lime, dump it into a medicine bottle, and carry it to him. Then he would sit in his wheelchair at the head of the passenger line, savoring the greasy liquid while the passengers thought he was taking his medicine.

He made himself wait until she had been gone at least half the time it would take. Finally he wheeled himself to a pay phone in the corridor. He pulled himself high enough to drop in a dime and dialed the *Times Herald*. He bit off a chew and said into the mouthpiece, "I want to talk to a reporter."

When the reporter came on the line he began talking rapidly around the chew: "I just seen this nutty-looking woman in the airport fooling around with a box with some wires sticking out of it. It looked like there was dynamite in there." He gave a description of his wife and hung up. He spat the wad of tobacco into the ash-tray and went back to the head of the line.

The attendant was ready to board passengers when his wife returned and he had to gulp down his medicine while he was rolling into the plane. He muscled himself into an aisle seat in the empty first class section. She folded the wheelchair, stored it, and told him goodbye.

"I have a feeling this is going to work out," she said.

"So do I."

Her green eyes suddenly grew suspicious as they fixed on the little box he let slip from beneath his coat. He tried to hide it and she grabbed it.

When she opened the box she saw a neat layer of chewing tobacco. She dropped the box into her shoulder bag and said, "California is mess enough without you spitting all over the place."

He argued, but she marched up the aisle. *So far, so good*, he told himself.

The plane banked steeply over the airport. He pointed out the window and said to one of the flight attendants, "Look like police cars. Sure are in a hurry."

"I wonder what's wrong."

He looked at his watch and

smiled. "As explosive as things are today, I reckon they have a lot of emergencies."

Then he decided to put a little icing on the cake. "You know, my wife gave me a going away present, but I don't see it anywhere. I wonder if she picked it up by mistake."

"Oh, I almost forgot," the flight attendant said. "She said to give this to you once we got off the ground." She placed the little box in his lap.

The ticking of his wristwatch seemed to grow steadily louder while he read the note on the box: *There are some things I just can't take away from you. I want you to have this as much as you do.*

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Tough Cop's Girl

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Jean Was a Nice Young Lady. But Going with a Detective Like Charles Had Its Hardening Effect.

THE DOWNSTAIRS buzzer sounded at exactly eight o'clock and Jean Walker pressed the door release button without a second thought. It was not unlike Charles to arrive a half-hour early for their date. She opened the hall door to greet him and was startled to see the tall man she didn't know coming up the stairs.

"Oh! I was expecting someone else!"

He smiled at her, revealing a gap of missing teeth that turned his handsome face suddenly ugly. "I'm looking for Detective Charles Moon. Someone said he'd be here."

She hesitated only a moment. "Certainly. I'm expecting Detective Moon shortly. Won't you come in?"

He entered her apartment and took a seat near the door, not bothering to remove his coat. "Thanks, Miss. If you don't mind, I'll just wait for him."

She finished applying her make-

up in the bathroom and came out for a moment. "Would you like a beer while you're waiting?"

"Sure!"

Jean took one from the refrigerator and poured it into a glass. He smiled his toothless grin and accepted it with thanks. "Do you want to see Detective Moon on a police matter?" she asked.

"Sort of."

He downed the beer quickly and stood up, seeming to reach a decision. Jean stood up too, almost as a reflex action, and saw his fist suddenly shoot up at her face. She tried to cry out but there was no time. She toppled backward into the chair and slid to the floor, her whole face throbbing with pain.

He bent over, grabbed at her blouse and slapped her hard across the cheek. "You just tell Moon to keep his nose clean."

She toppled over as he released her, burying her face in the thick rug. She was aware of his pausing

long enough to wipe off the glass he'd used, then there was the sound of a door opening and closing and he was gone. For a full five minutes she was too hurt and frightened to move. Then, finally, she struggled to her feet.

She staggered to the bathroom and stared at herself in the mirror, surprised it wasn't worse. After a moment, the buzzer sounded again. She washed off her face and went to answer it.

"Who's there?"

"Charles. What's the matter?"

She pressed the buzzer and waited till he climbed the stairs, then collapsed, sobbing, into his arms. "What in hell happened to your face?"

She led him inside and told him about the man with the missing teeth. "My God, Charles, who was he?"

Charles Moon sat silently for a moment, holding her in his arms. "I don't know. But I'm sure as hell going to find out."

She knew he was right. There was never anything to fear when Charles Moon was around. He was a big man with steel-gray eyes and a body that could move like a panther's when necessary. Around town, he had a reputation as a tough cop.

"Charles?"

"Yes?"

"Do you think it could have anything to do with the baby?"

His gray eyes hardened. "Maybe," he said quietly.

IT HAD happened the previous Friday evening as Jean Walker was leaving a bridal shower at a friend's home. She had had the beginnings of a dull headache all afternoon and the family-oriented chatter of the married women at the party had done nothing to relieve it.

When Mary's husband Steve arrived home early she had taken the opportunity of the diversion to make her quick farewells and depart. Her car was parked a half-block away and she walked quickly to it, ignoring the deep shadows between the oddly spaced street lights.

As she unlocked her car door she heard the baby cry. She paid no attention at first — it was a warm September night and many doors were open to catch any hint of a breeze. But when the muffled cry was repeated she realized it came from the next car. She walked over and peered in the open window of the little foreign sedan.

There was indeed a baby in the back seat, a tiny infant nestled in a fuzzy pink blanket. When the crying continued, she turned and walked up the front steps of the nearest house, pressed the door bell.

"Pardon me," she told the man who answered, "but is that your car? There's a baby crying inside."

He looked beyond her to the street. He was small and sleepy-

eyed, and had probably been dozing in front of the television set. "A baby? In *my* car?" Wide awake now, he followed her out to the parked vehicle. "First time in a month I forget to close the window and look what happens!"

"It's not your baby?"

"Does it *look* like mine? My wife's visiting her mother in St. Louis. Am I likely to have babies in my car?"

"All right," she said. "Then let's call the police."

"Police!"

"I have a friend who's a detective. He'll send someone."

"No sirens!" He scratched his head and led her back to the house. "Who in hell'd leave a baby in my car?"

As Jean dialed the familiar number she asked, "What's your name and address here?"

"Mike Saffern, 29 Willow Grove Lane. This won't get in the papers will it?"

Before she could answer, a familiar voice came on the line. "Charles, this is Jean," she said, talking fast. "I was leaving the shower and I found an abandoned baby. At least it seems to be abandoned." She listened and then gave him the address.

"He's coming?" Saffern asked when she hung up.

Jean nodded. "We shouldn't leave the baby alone. Poor thing!"

They went back outside and waited by the car till Charles arrived. "Where's the baby?"

he asked. The darkness covered his eyes so she couldn't see their expression.

"Here in the car. Mr. Saffern, this is Detective Charles Moon."

Charles grunted and shook hands, then turned his attention to the baby. He unwrapped the fluffy bunting a bit and withdrew a large green leaf. "What's this?"

"A leaf, I guess," she said, giving words to the obvious.

"But too big for any of the maples and willows on this street. Come on — we'll take the baby downtown. How old you figure he is?"

She studied the puckered little face and thin wisp of blondish hair. "Maybe three or four months, no more. And it's a girl."

Charles slipped the leaf into his pocket. "All right, let's go. Thanks for your help, Mr. Saffern."

"Do you want to ask me questions?" the little man said.

"Why? Do you know something about it?"

"Not a thing."

"Then go back in the house. We know where to find you."

He watched the man retreat onto his porch, then made a note of his license number.

"I'll follow you downtown in my car," Jean told him.

He grunted. "What were you doing over here? I thought the shower was at Sally's."

"Her child was sick, so we moved it to Mary Ascott's at the

last minute. Was I supposed to report to you?" Sometimes she resented the third degree.

"All right, follow me in," he said, ignoring her mood.

A half-hour later they had left the infant with a kindly woman who made clucking noises over the inhumanity of abandoning babies in car.

"All in a night's work," Charles remarked over coffee a little later.

"Is it? Do you find babies every day?"

"The mother probably panicked. Happens all the time with illegitimate kids."

"She panicked after four months?"

Charles smiled. "You playing detective?"

"What about the leaf? I saw you stick it in your pocket."

"I got a tree at the apartment has a few bare spots."

"Cut out the humor and answer me for once!"

He took the leaf from his pocket, laying it on the table between them. It was oval in shape and quite large, more than four inches across. The underside was downy, as was the bit of twig still attached to it. When he held the leaf to the light it seemed almost transparent.

"Ever see leaves like this around here, Jean?"

"No," she admitted. "It's not oak or maple, and that's the extent of my tree knowledge."

"It's curious. Maybe tomorrow, if the mother hasn't turned up, I'll call a friend who knows about trees."

SHE SLEPT restlessly that night and in her dreams she saw again the tiny baby in the car. There was a dark shadow over it, but the shadow was only Charles with his broad shoulders and hard gray eyes. She awoke sweating, torn from sleep by the ringing of the telephone.

It was only Mary Ascott, cheerfully assuming everyone was awake at nine-thirty on a Saturday morning. "Hi, kid. Sorry you had to leave so early last night. Feeling better today?"

"I'm feeling fine, Mary."

"Good! The kids came back from my mother's this morning and they're tearing around the house like crazy!" She covered the mouthpiece to yell at them, then returned with, "Say, you left your compact here — that fancy gold job."

"Oh?" She hadn't missed the compact, a Christmas gift from Charles Moon's immediate predecessor. "Thanks for calling, Mary. I was worried about it."

"I thought you might be. We're here all day if you want to pick it up."

"Thanks, Mary. I'll swing by sometime this afternoon."

She hung up and plugged in the coffee pot. There were disadvantages to living alone — disad-

vantages like no one to answer the phone and make the coffee. Charles had urged her more than once to move in with him, but after a year of sleeping together he hadn't yet suggested anything as permanent as marriage.

There was nothing in the morning paper about finding the baby, but she hadn't really expected there would be. Exactly at noon the phone rang again, and this time it was Charles.

"Did I get you up?" he asked, knowing her habits.

"No, I've been up for hours."

"Want to come along while I talk to the tree man?"

"Who?"

"The man about the leaf we found last night."

"Sure, I'll go along."

"Pick you up at one?"

"Fine. I should stop by Mary's for a minute. I left my compact there last night."

He arrived promptly at one, wearing a pink sport shirt she had given him for his birthday. The summer weather still lingered and it was warm enough for Jean to wear her dark cotton slacks. "Nice," he said, holding the car door for her. It was about as close to a compliment as he ever came. "Where first? Mary Ascott?"

"If you don't mind."

On Mary's street they passed Mike Saffern in his yard, applying an autumn grub-killer to his

speckled lawn. He didn't look up as they passed.

"I'll wait in the car," Charles said, parking in front of Mary's.

"Oh, come on in. You know Mary and Steve." But when he still resisted, she left him in the car and strolled up the driveway to the attached garage, where she could see Steve cleaning out the car.

"Hello, Jean," he said, glancing up from a little pile of cigarette butts and candy wrappers and pink fuzz. "The kids sure make a mess of this car. Nice day." Steve was the handyman, the smiling husband, the ball-playing dad. Jean liked him, though only as Mary's husband. He had no independent existence for her.

Mary Ascott came out the door. "Hello, Jean — here's the compact. Want to come in for a beer?"

"I'd better not stop. Charles is waiting in the car."

"The tough cop, eh?" Mary didn't approve of Jean's relationship with Charles Moon. "Has he got his gun and handcuffs?"

"Now, Mary!" Steve mumbled, trying to keep the peace.

Jean laughed it off as their youngest child — a sturdy boy of three — came running out of the house. She knelt to say a few words to him, then said goodbye and went back to the car.

"You're a regular little mother," Charles said with a smile.

"Sure I am."

The tree man turned out to be an assistant professor of botany at City College. He was a tall, handsome young man named David Bentmore, who greeted them with a smile. "Pleased to meet you at last, Miss Walker. Charles mentions you often."

"Oh?"

Charles Moon blushed uncharacteristically. "I wanted to ask you about this leaf, Dave."

"A clue?" Bentmore asked with a smile.

"Sort of."

He placed the leaf before him on his desk, studying its oval shape. "Linden," he said almost at once. "Specifically the large-leaved linden *Tilia platyphyllos*. You don't see many in this area."

"Just where do you see them in this area?" Charles asked.

"The tree is native to Europe but some have been imported. The only grove I know around here is down by the river. Remember, about ten years ago, there was talk of a park at the end of Bright Street? That's where the lindens are. They never did anything about the park, though."

"Thanks," Charles said. "That helps a lot."

"Come any time. And bring Jean along with you."

Back in the car she turned to Charles. "All right, what is it? You're concerned about this thing. I can see it in your face. You're

acting like this is a case."

"There was a spot on the baby's blanket that might have been blood."

"Blood?"

"I'm probably wrong. I don't have the lab report yet."

"So now we're going down to the end of Bright Street?"

"If it is blood, it didn't come from the baby. I want to look around down there. You don't have to come along."

But she came, of course. She had never been on Bright Street before. It was a semi-suburban neighborhood where new homes were still separated by occasional unimproved lots. At the end of the street, a narrow footpath led down to the river and the abandoned park site.

"Think you'll find anything?" she asked.

"Stranger things have happened."

The path turned downward more sharply and they saw a thick stand of trees near the water. "Is that it?"

Charles nodded. "Our linden trees. Stay here. I'll go down alone."

He was gone fifteen minutes. She followed his progress mainly by ear, catching occasional glimpses of him through the trees. Finally he returned, out of breath from the climb. "Okay," he told her.

"Nothing?"

"Something. Too much of some-

thing. A dead woman with her head battered in."

THE DEAD woman's name was Paula Trammers. She had lived in a small apartment house near downtown, where only the landlady seemed to have been her friend. Her name was Sarah Wine and Charles questioned her that night.

"When she told me she was pregnant, I asked why she didn't get an abortion. They all do it these days, you know. But Paula was different. I guess she thought if she had the baby, he might marry her."

"Who might?" Charles Moon asked.

"The baby's father. Don't know who he was. She never had any men around here."

Charles Moon nodded. It was easy, open and shut. Just find the father.

He told Jean about it on Sunday evening, sitting in her apartment with his stocking feet comfortably in place on the coffee table. She liked him especially at moments like this. Perhaps he was still the tough cop some called him, but he was also a very human person.

"The father killed her — I've no doubt of it. She met him down there among the linden trees. She wanted something, either marriage or money, and he killed her with a convenient rock."

"Why not just a tramp, or a

sex maniac?"

Charles shook his head. "She wasn't molested. And can you imagine a tramp bothering to carry away the baby?"

"Can I go with you to question people?"

He leaned back, wiggling his toes. "I'm not officially on the case. I brought in the baby and I found the body, so the Homicide boys aren't squeezing me out. But the captain could order me off it at any time."

"Maybe I could help you, Charles. Maybe I could talk to the landlady again."

"Forget it, Jean. There are killings like this every week. Just the sordid end to a sordid life."

"And the baby?"

"She'll be taken care of."

He got up and poured himself a drink.

ON MONEY morning Jean called in sick. They wouldn't miss her at the insurance office for one day, and she had a feeling she might learn something at Paula Trammers' apartment. The landlady's face was as wrinkled as Charles had said, but the apartment house itself was neat and well-kept.

"You a reporter?" the suspicious Mrs. Wine asked, allowing her no further than the front steps. "I can't tell you anything I didn't tell the police."

"I'm especially interested in the baby, Mrs. Wine. Someone —

some man — must have come her occasionally to see it.”

“No,” Sarah Wine insisted, and then added reluctantly, “except maybe to pick her up for dates.”

“Then you *did* see a man!”

“Well . . . two of them, really, but I never got more than a glimpse of them. One came looking for her while she was off having the baby. A tall, good-looking fellow. I never got a good look at the other one.”

“Did you hear their names?”

She shook her head. “I’d have told the police if I did.”

Jean felt a growing frustration. “I suppose the police searched her things.”

Mrs. Wine looked away, uneasy again. “They searched her apartment.”

Jean took a long chance. “But they didn’t search everything, did they?”

“Well, I forgot about the suitcase she’d stored in the basement.”

“Could I see it?”

“Oh, no! The police wouldn’t like that.”

“Do they have to know?”

“I don’t want any trouble.”

“You could stand right there and watch me. I wouldn’t take anything.”

Mrs. Wine thought about it. Finally she said, “Paula was a good girl. I want to help find who killed her.”

She led the way to the basement with Jean close behind. Like the

rest of the place, it seemed clean and well-organized, with neat piles of boxes and suitcases against the far wall. Mrs. Wine showed her a tan suitcase that was no longer new.

Jean tried the lock, feeling the old frustration again. “You don’t have a key?”

Mrs. Wine shook her head. “But I know where her keys are, if the police didn’t take them,” She hurried off upstairs, returning in a few moments with a little bunch of assorted keys. “It might be this small one here.”

The key opened the suitcase, and Jean knelt on the concrete floor to examine its contents. Whatever she had been expecting, this wasn’t it. There was no clothes, no love letters — nothing but rubberbanded bank statements and canceled checks, department store bills and old income tax returns.

But there was an appointment book of sorts for the previous year. Jean flipped the pages, seeing casually scrawled notations in a hard-to-read backhand. There were names and initials on some nights — *Buddy* on weekends and *S.A.* often on Thursdays. At one point, an idle doodle had transformed *S.A.* into *Sex Appeal*.

Paula Trammers had been seeing two men regularly this last year. One of them was almost certainly the baby’s father.

Jean looked through the rest

of the suitcase but found nothing else of interest. She thanked Mrs. Wine and left the house, wondering if she had really found anything important.

That evening, while she waited for Charles, the man with the missing teeth had come to her door, and beaten her.

CHARLES MOON held an ice bag to her cheek, trying to keep down the swelling. "You may have a black eye," he said, "but otherwise, I guess you're all right."

She told him about her visit to the dead girl's apartment house, then sat quietly while he lectured her. "Damn it, Jean, snooping around murder cases can get you killed! Maybe one of those two guys is your friend with the missing teeth."

The thought hadn't crossed her mind until that moment. "But he asked for you. Mrs. Wine didn't know I was connected with you. Did you see anyone today?"

He shook his head. "There was a pack of matches in her purse from the Cozy Hour Cafe. They recognized her photo but couldn't add anything else. The bartender said she came in on Friday nights for their fish fry."

"Alone?"

"Sometimes. Or with another girl. Why?"

"Her appointment book for last year showed she usually saw this Buddy on weekends, Fridays

or Saturdays. How come he didn't go with her to the Cozy Hour?"

"All right," Charles sighed. "Cover that bruise with some makeup and I'll take you down there. If you think the guy who slugged you is connected with Paula Trammers maybe you can describe him to the bartender."

They drove to the Cozy Hour and found it almost deserted on a Monday night. "Look!" she said, grabbing Charles by the arm as they entered. "There's Mr. Saffern, the man whose car the baby was in!"

Charles shrugged his broad shoulders. "Not too unusual. We're only three blocks from Willow Grove Drive."

Saffern nodded, a bit embarrassed at seeing them there, and went on drinking.

Charles leaned across the bar and asked the ugly man behind it, "Where's the other bartender? The one I talked to this afternoon?"

The burly man wiped his nose. "You mean Buddy? He's in the back."

"Buddy! Charles, that's the name in the —"

"Come on," he said quietly. She followed him through a swinging kitchen door and saw a tall man turn from the refrigerator toward him. He opened his mouth and she saw the missing teeth and her stomach turned to ice.

"Charles, it's him! The man who hit me!"

Buddy cursed and grabbed for a breadknife, but Charles was already on him. The knife flew across the kitchen and they went down together. She saw Charles slash at him twice with his fists and then get slowly to his feet.

"My God, Charles . . ."

"Now he's got a few less teeth. Maybe it'll teach him not to beat up women. Call the office for me, will you, Jean? Tell them to send out a car." He reached into his pocket for a pair of handcuffs.

"DO YOU think he killed her?" Jean asked later, after the police had booked Buddy for assault.

"Hard to say. He's got a record and he might just be scared of cops. I never noticed those missing teeth when the Homicide dick and I questioned him earlier."

"You only see them when he smiles or snarls," Jean said. "Does he admit hitting me?"

"Oh, sure. His story is that he overheard me mention to the Homicide dick that I'd be seeing you tonight. He looked you up in the phone book and went over with the intention of telling me the truth about his relationship with Paul Trammers — telling me she came in the Cozy Hour on Friday and Saturday nights to see him.

"He was afraid the other bartender might spill it anyway. But while he was waiting at your place, he saw some notes you'd made about Buddy and Paula. He pan-

icked and hit you and ran. Damn fool thing to do!"

"Why should he panic because I knew what he was going to tell you anyway?"

Charles Moon shrugged. "Who knows? He's knocked girls around before. Maybe he looks for excuses."

"I don't suppose she could have expected to meet anyone much different in a place like the Cozy Hour."

Charles agreed. "Just losers and husbands cheating on their wives."

"Which is Mike Saffern?" she asked, remembering the little man they had seen at the bar.

"Maybe a little of both."

Jean went to sleep thinking of Buddy's fist lashing out at her. She woke in the morning thinking of something else entirely. The thought frightened her, but she knew what he had to be done. After breakfast, she drove through the cool morning calm to Mary Ascott's house on Willow Grove Lane.

She parked in front of Mary's and walked up the driveway to the garage, where the children were playing. "Hi," she said. "No school today?"

"Teachers' meeting," the oldest one informed her.

"Is your Mommy around?"

"She's in the back yard."

Jean walked around the side of the garage and found Mary Ascott trimming a tangled growth

of shrubbery. "Hello, Mary," she said. "How are you?"

"Jean! Aren't you working today?"

"I took off."

"Not feeling well? What happened to your face?"

Jean felt the swollen area. "An accident, nothing serious. I came about this business with the baby, Mary. The baby in Mr. Saffern's car."

She nodded with casual interest. "He told me about it. Why didn't you mention it when you stopped by the next morning?"

"I suppose it slipped my mind." Jean took a deep breath. "Mary, I have to ask you something. The children were at your mother's on Friday night, weren't they? And the shower was supposed to be at Sally's. So there shouldn't have been anyone home at your house, right?"

"Well, yes. Baby sitters are hard to find in this neighborhood on Fridays. It was easier to leave them at my mother's, and then the shower got shifted over." She eyed Jean strangely. "You came out just to ask me that?"

One of the children came running up, to be patted and sent on his way by Mary Ascott. Mary — her friend — a wife and mother. Jean hurried on. "Mary, did you read about the woman who was killed? Paula Trammers?"

"Yes, I guess so."

"Mary, I think Steve might have

been involved in her death."

"Steve? My husband?" Her face went blank.

"I think so. This woman, Paula Trammers, had an appointment book. One of the men she dated had Steve's initials, S.A."

Mary Ascott's face suddenly hard as stone. "And because of that you're trying to say he killed her?"

"There's lots more, Mary. Please listen. You *have* to listen!"

"Not to a pack of lies from you!"

"*Mary!* Steve was cleaning out the car Saturday. He was cleaning out some pink fuzz, like the fuzz on the baby's blanket."

She covered her ears. "Go away! Go away from here, Jean!" Her face was twisted with fury. "You've always wanted him, haven't you? You've been jealous ever since I married Steve, you little tramp! Go on back to your detective!"

"Mary, *listen* to me. The person who killed Paula Trammers took great pains to save the baby, even at the risk of being seen carrying it from the murder scene. Only the baby's father would have been that concerned. Paula had two boyfriends — Buddy and S.A."

"Buddy would have killed her long ago if he was going to do it at all. But S.A was the one she usually saw on Thursday nights. That in itself implies a man who had to be with his family on weekends. She met Buddy just three

blocks from here at the Cozy Hour Cafe, and she could have met your husband at the same place."

"*Get out of here,*" Mary said again, making each word a dagger.

"Steve thought the house would be empty and he was bringing the baby home till he decided what to do with it. But as he turned onto the street, he had a terrible shock awaiting him. The shower had been moved to your house at the last minute. There was nothing he could do but leave the baby in Saffern's unlocked car. Remember, Steve came home just before I left and found the baby."

"*Stop it, stop it!*"

"Mary — do you think I want to tell you these things?"

Mary Ascott closed her eyes, suddenly drained of fury, and leaned against the back of the garage. "I knew he had someone else," she said finally in a voice that was almost a whisper. "I even suspected about the baby. She sent him a letter once and I got a glimpse of it. But you don't understand, Jean. You'd never understand unless you were married and a mother yourself."

"If he killed her —"

"I don't know that, and you can never convince me of it. I only know he's back with me now, that he never sees her any more. If she tried to blackmail him or force herself on him — force the baby on him — maybe she de-

served to die. If he *did* kill her, it was because he loved *me!* Don't you understand that, Jean?"

"I guess I don't."

"Are you going to tell Charles Moon all this?"

Jean looked into the tormented face before her and felt a power she'd never known before, the power to destroy her friend's family. "I have to think about it, Mary," she said finally.

As she drove away from the house, she saw Steve Ascott's car turning into the quiet street. As they passed, he smiled and waved. He might have been an old friend, or the husband of an old friend.

She found Charles in his office, reading over some neatly typed reports. He looked up, surprised, as she entered. "How's the face feel today?"

"I'd almost forgotten about it," she admitted, touching the bruise. "What about the case?"

"We're still holding Buddy. There's no one else; and with his record we'll probably charge him."

She thought about Mary Ascott's family. "You're a tough cop, Charles," she said, groping for words.

"So they tell me."

She steeled herself for the awful thing she had to do — to Mary and Steve and their children. "Then I guess I'm a tough cop's girl," she said, and told him about it.

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A Drink Before Dying

by W.L. FIELDHOUSE

Major Lansing's Problem This Time Is to Discover Who Put
Ground Glass in Sergeant Stowers' Bourbon.

USAEUR (United States Army in Europe) forces — like military personnel everywhere—are grateful for off-duty hours. Most soldiers are able to take advantage of Saturday and Sunday to shed their uniforms and attempt to forget about “The Green Machine” for a while.

Because of the dwindling status of the dollar abroad, however, American servicemen spend less time in German stores, restaurants and taverns. These days, Army personnel and their families spend more time shopping in the PX and killing time in the apartment buildings in the housing district. The Saturday night poker game at Master Sergeant Potter's apartment had been started for these reasons.

MSG George Potter was a big, powerful man with a lantern jaw and a white-walled crew cut. At forty-two, Potter was still built like a professional wrestler. People used to say that if the 123rd Engineering Battalion's bulldozer broke down, George could take its place.

Potter's wife, Peggy, kept the apartment neat and clean. The

carpet and sofa were always vacuumed and the kitchenette was always spotless. Peggy was a quietly pretty woman who wore her blonde hair in a tight bun at the back of her head and favored long tent dresses and flat-heeled shoes. Everyone considered her a nice, domestic housewife.

Two guests had already arrived. Like Potter, they wore casual civilian clothing and close-cropped hair. Harlon W. James sat by the card table, consuming potato chips from a serving dish. A stout man with a bulging midsection and a receding hairline, James was the first sergeant of Delta Battery at the 123rd Bn., Snyder Barracks. His flabby rump seemed to hang over the seat of his folding chair.

Warrant Officer Andrew Vantor was also sitting at the table. He was a tall, rail-thin man with baggy bloodshot eyes framed by a sorrowful face. Years of frowning had carved deep lines at the corners of his mouth. He solemnly removed two liquor bottles from a paper bag as he glanced at the wall clock.

A harsh pounding drew everyone's attention to the door. It

opened before Potter could answer it, and a handsome man in a camel's hair coat entered. He ignored the newspapers Peggy had placed by the door and walked to the card table, tracking mud and slush from his boots.

"So all my happy little friends are gathered together again." He sneered, the expression twisting his lean face into a sarcastic mask. "Did somebody bring something decent to drink? It's goddamn cold out there."

"Yeah." James nodded eagerly. "The weather's so lousy I just know the general is gonna decide to send us on a field maneuver."

"All you know is how to stuff your fat face," the newcomer replied.

He was Staff Sergeant Richard Stowers, NCO in charge of Delta Battery's supply section. Off-duty, SSG Stowers treated his higher-ranking non-coms with utter insolence. Stowers could do this with total safety. The others would tolerate his behavior no matter how obnoxious he was. They *had* to.

"I brought you a fifth of Kentucky bourbon," Ventor explained as he handed a bottle to Stowers. "Your regular brand."

George Potter walked to the kitchenette and extracted two beer mugs and two tumblers from a cabinet.

"I'll take my glass now," Ventor said, glancing at Stowers.

"I need one."

"Don't you always." Stowers snorted.

Potter carried a tumbler to Ventor. The warrant officer quickly began peeling the seal off his other bottle, a fifth of Scotch. As Ventor poured his drink (he drank it straight), Potter snapped his fingers.

"I left the poker chips in the bedroom," George said.

"Well, they won't walk out here on their own," Stowers muttered sourly as he read the label on the bourbon bottle.

"I'll get them, dear," Peggy offered.

"No. I know where they are," Potter said as he moved across the room to the bedroom door. "Hey, Har? Why don't you get us both a beer?"

"Sure," James agreed, raising his ponderous frame from his chair.

"Here, fatso," Stowers snapped, extending the bourbon bottle. "While you're out there, fix my drink too."

James' face darkened, but he silently took the bottle and dutifully obeyed. Walking to the kitchenette, he peeled off the seal and unscrewed the cap.

Turning to Peggy, Stowers said, "I know you've been busy cleaning house like a good little wifey-poo (not that this pigsty couldn't use it), but you did manage to make some ice, didn't you?"

"There are some ice cubes in the bucket, Har," she said, pretending she hadn't heard Stowers' remark.

James dropped two cubes into the tumbler on the counter, then poured into the glass.

"Good boy," Stowers jeered. "Now, waddle on back here and give it to me."

Potter emerged from the bedroom with two boxes of multi-colored poker chips. Peggy moved to the kitchenette, poured beer into the mugs for her husband and James, then prepared a glass of rum and Coke for herself. They sat down at the card table and began distributing cards and chips.

"What's the game?" George asked.

"Stud poker." Stowers smiled. "In my honor."

They played cards and sipped their drinks. Less than half an hour later, SSG Stowers began to choke. At first, he seemed only to have drawn some bourbon up into his sinus passages. Suddenly, his eyes bulged as he put one hand to his throat and the other to his stomach. He tried to rise, tumbled backward and took the chair with him to the floor. Four startled faces stared down at him as he twitched violently, blood seeping between the fingers clamped over his mouth.

One onlooker wasn't horrified by what had occurred. That person was only surprised that it had

taken so long to happen.

A tall lean figure rushed up the stairs. A military policeman standing guard at the apartment door to keep curiosity seekers at bay noticed the golden oakleaf tacked to the newcomer's green baseball cap. He saluted crisply.

"Morning," the major said, returning the salute with a gloved hand. "I'm Lansing, CID."

"Criminal Investigation Department?" the MP asked, surprise accenting his words.

"Very good. That's what the initials stand for," Lansing said dryly. "May I go in?"

"Sure — that is, yes, sir." The sentry nodded eagerly as he opened the door.

Lansing entered, stamping snow off his "Airborne" boots and unzipping his olive drab field jacket. He quickly glanced over the four people inside the apartment. Ventor and James stood at attention, Peggy Potter remained seated, and an MP buck sergeant stood beside Ventor with a .45 caliber pistol in his hand.

"As you were," Lansing said, turning to the MP. "What are you doing with that gun, sergeant?"

"I was guarding the suspect, sir," the MP replied.

"Suspect?" Lansing's brow crinkled. "We're not even certain a crime has been committed — and *if* foul play is involved,

everyone is a suspect," Lansing told him as he removed his cap to reveal neatly trimmed brown-gray hair. "Now, put that .45 away."

"Excuse me, sir," James began. "Are we to understand that we're suspected of doing something to Dick?"

"I received a phone call about zero-one-hundred hours," Lansing explained. "General Clayton told me to get out of bed and down here because a Staff Sergeant Richard Stowers had just died at the Army hospital in Nuremburg. Possible homicide."

"Oh, my God!" Peggy gasped.

"Now, as I understand this matter," Lansing said, "you were all playing cards, drinking socially, then Stowers fell over and started to choke to death. You called an ambulance, and when it arrived Master Sergeant Potter rode with Stowers to the hospital. I'll have to get his statement later." Turning to the MP, he added, "You *did* manage to get their statements while you were busy waving that pistol around, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir," the sergeant said.

"Very good," Lansing commented as he peered down at the glasses on the card table. The first was an empty tumbler, but the odor of Scotch whisky told him it had recently been used. Traces of foam indicated the two beer mugs had also seen service. A small glass contained some dark cola-colored liquid with a red

swizzle stick jutting from its surface.

"That's the one Dick was drinking," James said as Lansing moved to the last tumbler.

He leaned over it without touching the glass. A small piece of half-melted ice floated in some dark liquid at the bottom of the tumbler. It smelled like Kentucky bourbon without any tell-tale scent to suggest it could be deadly.

"Sir?" the MP said. "I think you should know that we caught him with that glass in his hand when we arrived." He pointed at Venter.

"Can I have some names for these people?" Lansing sighed. After introductions, Lansing said, "All right, Mister Venter," he began, addressing the warrant officer according to military custom. "What were you doing with Stowers' drink?"

"I was going to pour it down the crapper," the warrant officer replied thickly, his voice slurred. "It must be bad stuff."

"He already admitted he dumped the rest of the bourbon down the toilet and then threw the bottle away, sir," the MP put in.

"Yeah." Venter nodded dully. "I brought the bottle so I figured I should get rid of it."

"He brought Stowers' bourbon?" Lansing asked the others. "I thought this was a 'bring your own booze' party."

"It was," Peggy replied. "But

Andy always brought two bottles, one for Dick and one for himself."

"I see," Lansing remarked dryly. "Where's your trash can?"

"In the kitchenette, under the counter."

"He didn't throw it away in there, sir," the MP said as Lansing moved to the other room.

Kneeling by the trash can, Lansing removed a pen from this fatigue shirt pocket and carefully used its capped plastic end to probe the contents of the can. He discovered some garbage wrapped in newspapers, several caps from beer and Coke bottles, some used paper towels, the paper seals from two liquor bottles, a balled-up cigarette pack and some used butts.

"I said he didn't throw it away in there," the military cop said.

"I heard you, Sergeant," Lansing assured him. "I don't want anyone to touch that trash can until I say so," he ordered as he walked back into the main room. "Now, Sergeant, where *did* Mr. Venter discard this bottle?"

"He dropped it down a disposal chute at the end of the hall," Peggy explained, "but he wasn't thinking straight. He's been drinking heavily. I'm sure he didn't mean to do anything wrong."

"I hope you're right, Mrs. Potter," Lansing smiled thinly.

"I could tell Merrill to go down to the dumpster outside. The trash chute opens into it. Maybe he can find that bottle," the MP

suggested.

"Merril is the spec-four outside the door?" Lansing asked.

"Yes, sir."

"I want him right where he is. He's doing his job. *He* wasn't waving a gun around," Lansing remarked. "I'd rather you go down to the dumpster. Don't mill around in the garbage looking for the bourbon bottle. Just keep the rubbernecks out of the way until the CID can send a team from the lab to collect evidence. Understand?"

"Yes, sir," the cop answered half-heartedly.

"And *don't* take that .45 out of the holster again unless you have a reason to use it," Lansing warned. "I don't want to have to file any unfavorable reports concerning your conduct. Agreed?"

The MP nodded vigorously. He snapped to attention. The cop and Lansing exchanged salutes, then the MP marched from the apartment to carry out the order.

"Did Wyatt Earp get a statement from each of you?" Lansing asked the suspects.

Peggy smiled. "Yes, although he seemed to think he had the case all wrapped up before you arrived. What about George?"

"I'll get his statement later," Lansing said as he picked up the MP's clip board.

He read their statements carefully, comparing their versions of what had occurred. All three suspects had good memories (Venter

had still been sober when he'd written his statement), and their stories were very similar. Lansing asked them about the incident, checking their verbal responses with their written versions. As he was rereading the reports, the telephone rang. Peggy answered it.

"It's for you, Major," she said with surprise.

"Thank you," Lansing said, accepting the phone. Speaking into it, he said, "This is Lansing . . . Yeah. What have you got? . . . I see . . ."

He hung up. The three suspects stared at him, their expressions revealing their eagerness to know what the call was about. Lansing didn't keep them in suspense.

"That was Doctor Manning at the hospital. He discovered something that all but confirms Stowers' death was not an accident. We won't be certain until after an autopsy has been performed, but we have a pretty definite idea to how Stowers died," the CID officer said.

"Poison?" James asked, an unsteady note in his voice.

Lansing shook his head. "Manning took a sample of the blood Stowers vomited and put it under a microscope. He discovered small slivers and ground fragments of glass." Lansing's eyes hardened as he scanned their numb faces. "If one of you is responsible, you sure chose one hell of an ugly way to kill a man."

THE FOLLOWING morning, Maj. Clifford Lansing dressed in a class-A winter uniform with more than a score of ribbons, most of them earned in Vietnam as an Airborne Ranger. He called the WACs billet attached to the Criminal Investigation Department. A female sergeant, serving charge of quarters duty, answered. Lansing asked her to put Specialist First Class Wendy Davis on the phone. Moments later, the pleasant voice of SP5 Davis greeted him.

Wendy's femininity wasn't limited to the sound of her voice. As his personal secretary, Lansing was well aware that she was a strikingly attractive young woman. Sometimes he thought she was too attractive, but she was also a devoted and skilled secretary, and — odd as it seemed for such a pretty lady — a damned good soldier.

"Wendy, I want you to go to Ansbach and draw the two-o-one files on the following personnel." He read the names and ranks of Potter, James, Vantor and the late Richard Stowers. He told her where they were stationed and what units they belonged to.

"This is Sunday, sir," she remarked. "I might have some trouble getting those files." His 201 file contains most pertinent information about the individual's military history and prior civilian life.

Silly girl! Lansing thought. If Wendy really turned on the charm she could probably get the average male GI to smuggle top secret documents from S-2. "You'll do all right," he assured her. "Be in the office by sixteen hundred hours. We have another homicide."

"That makes four this year!" she exclaimed.

"So what?" Lansing grinned into the mouthpiece. "When I was a police detective in Detroit I had that many cases coming in every week," he told her. "Be careful none of those boys at Ansbach get close enough to pinch you." He chuckled before hanging up.

At least I won't have to run all over Germany for this investigation, Lansing thought as he parked his little white Volkswagen in front of an apartment building. All four suspects and the victim had lived in the same tenement section.

Borrowing a passkey, he jogged up the stairwell to Stowers' apartment, unbuttoning his Army-issue overcoat and shaking snow from the garment. At the head of the stairs, he stopped with surprise as he saw a large man in front of Room 410, Stowers' apartment. Standing behind the man, Lansing watched his buffalo-like back arch as he strained at the doorknob with one massive set of fingers while the other hand

tried to cram a laminated card into the door frame.

"It's not as easy as it looks in the movies, is it?" Lansing commented, pulling off his gloves and shoving them into his pockets.

The big man turned, his face pale, eyes bulging with surprise and fear. Wetting his lips, he said, "I locked myself out..."

"Oh?" Lansing smiled as he advanced. "Then this is your apartment?"

"Yes, sir." MSG George Potter nodded eagerly.

"Maybe I can get it," Lansing offered, inserting the passkey into the door and unlocking it. "There."

"Thank you, sir," Potter said, trying to control his shaky voice.

"Well, let's go inside," Lansing suggested. "You wanted in badly enough. Then we can talk about what happened to Richard Stowers."

The big man nodded in submission and walked into the room. Lansing followed, watching Potter's yard-wide shoulders. The deltoids twitched suddenly and Potter spun, clasping his hands together as he swung them at Lansing.

Seeing the shoulder-shift, Lansing knew the attack was coming and nimbly dodged it. George's doubled fists struck the door frame with sledgehammer force. The apartment seemed to shake from the impact.

A *kiya* karate cry issued from

Lansing's throat. Reacting automatically, he threw a rock hard *seiken* punch to Potter's midsection, followed by a heel of the palm to the side of his head. Most men would have been knocked unconscious, but Potter merely staggered, growled angrily and charged with an old-fashioned left-right combination.

Assuming a *T-dachi*, Lansing sidestepped the first mallet-sized fist. He parried the second with his forearm, increasing Potter's forward momentum. Stepping behind his off-balance opponent, Lansing slashed the side of his right hand into the small of Potter's back and *shuto* chopped him between the shoulder blades with his left.

Potter cried out as he was propelled into the doorway. Lansing stepped closer and slammed the edge of his foot into the back of the big man's knee. George's leg buckled and he fell to his knees.

"I don't believe we've been introduced," the major remarked. "My name is Lansing, homicide investigator. Perhaps your wife mentioned me. You are Master Sergeant Potter, correct?"

George nodded weakly. He leaned against the door frame, panting.

"What did you want in here, Sergeant?"

"I — I came to get some tools he borrowed," Potter said, wincing as he began to rise. The muscles in his leg were numb and

his head was swimming. He slumped back to the floor with a groan. "I'm going to a construction site tomorrow. We're building a new billet at William O'Brian Caserne and I need them . . ."

"That's not even a convincing lie, Sergeant." Lansing sighed. "I expected you to claim you were here to carry out some last request good old Dick begged you to do, just before he passed away."

"*Damn it!*" Potter snapped. "Dick was my friend. I was so concerned about him I even rode with him in the ambulance."

"To be certain he didn't get a chance to say anything incriminating to witnesses? You needn't have worried. His throat was cut to pieces from the inside and he was strangling on his own blood—"

"No! I'm no murderer!" Potter insisted.

"Then explain what's so important you were willing to break into a man's apartment and assault a field grade officer."

"I can't," George whispered, his eyes shifting nervously in their sockets.

"Is there something worse to worry about than murder one?"

"Either way I'm finished," Potter muttered as he sat on the floor with his face buried in his hands. The big man resembled an overgrown child helplessly cornered by a wrathful parent.

"Tell me about it, Sergeant," Lansing urged gently.

"More than a year ago, I was in charge of a construction crew that repaired an old building over at Kirby Barracks."

"A service club with a dance floor on the second story?" Lansing asked.

"Yeah." Potter nodded sadly. "You heard about it?"

"I spent some time at Kirby a couple of months ago," Lansing replied. "They still talk about it."

"They had some kind of USO show up there. Too many people. The floor just gave way under their weight. Six dead, over a dozen injured."

"How did it happen?"

"We were using a brand of cement called *Fast & True*. Well, the government was having all those recalls and *Fast & True* was one of the products they claimed wasn't safe. Hell, who paid any attention?"

"Richard Stowers," Lansing guessed.

Potter nodded sorrowfully. "He was the supply sergeant, so he knew about the cement. He agreed to help cover up — destroy the evidence — when a team from the Inspector General's office arrived to investigate the accident. In return, Dick demanded I agree to anything he wanted."

"Blackmail?" Lansing asked, raising an eyebrow.

"You might call it that," Potter replied as he tried to rise again. "He had me use my rank and posi-

tion to help him get brownie points with the CO. Sometimes he demanded money, sometimes favors, sometimes he wanted social privileges such as the Saturday poker games at my apartment."

"Why did you come here?"

"Stowers claimed he had evidence of my incompetence which he threatened to turn over to the authorities if I didn't agree to everything he wanted. I figured I'd search his room before you got here and remove anything incriminating I might find."

Lansing sighed as he watched George unsteadily get to his feet. "Sergeant, I'm not interested in what happened a year ago unless it involves my homicide investigation. I don't have any reason to report something in your past. If you didn't murder Stowers you can rest as easily as your conscience allows."

"But I took a swing at you," the big man said, his expression dazed as he stared at the CID officer.

"Yeah, but you didn't hit me," Lansing shrugged. "Just be sure I get a full written statement concerning last night, and keep me informed about where you'll be at all times."

"You mean I'm not off the hook?" Potter frowned.

"Hardly," Lansing told him flatly. "You've just revealed that you had an excellent reason to want Stowers dead."

After MSG Potter limped from

the apartment and down the stairwell, Lansing searched the man's quarters. Stowers hadn't been a sentimental man. Lansing found no photographs of friends or family, no mementos or letters from loved ones. All Lansing discovered after fifteen minutes was a large pile of pornography and several bottles of Kentucky bourbon.

Lansing was beginning to think his visit to Stowers' apartment would prove futile until he found a small memo book in a dresser drawer beneath some underwear. Thumbing through it, Lansing discovered several dates had been circled with red ink. Beside each marked day was printed GEO, HAR, PEG or ANDY. Closing the booklet, Lansing solemnly tucked it into his jacket pocket. Stowers had been keeping track of more than weekly poker games. He had been running an extortion racket, with all his "friends" as victims.

SP5 Wendy Davis was waiting for Lansing when he entered his office. She'd returned from Ansbach with the 201 files as ordered. As Lansing hung his coat on a hat tree, Wendy relayed information from two phone calls to him.

"The hospital called while you were out, sir," she said. "An autopsy has confirmed that Stowers was killed by consuming ground glass." She winced at the thought of such a death. "And Colonel Fenton, the post commander of Snyder Barracks, called to ask how your investi-

gation has been going. He also offered to help in any way possible."

"Maybe he can," Lansing mused. Turning to Wendy he said, "If I can get the Colonel to set you up with a clerical job at Snyder Barracks would you agree to doing a little 'undercover' work?"

"Sure." She nodded.

"Good. I'll see if I can arrange it. Stowers was D Battery's supply sergeant. Potter and James are both assigned to Delta as well, so you may be able to pick up a clue or two from the local grapevine. Anything from the lab?"

"Not yet, sir," she replied, turning to face the door as she heard the doorknob rattle.

Major Conglose, a small, round-faced man with a receding hair line and a habitually sour personality, entered. Wendy snapped to attention as Lansing moaned with disgust and moved behind his desk to examine the 201 files.

Conglose and Lansing had never gotten along well. Conglose considered his fellow officer a rival, especially since Lansing had been promoted to Major. He envied Lansing's prestige as a successful homicide investigator and for being a favorite of General Clayton. Subconsciously, Conglose was also jealous because he realized Lansing was a better officer than himself. Lansing, however, merely considered Conglose a pest.

"That's right, Lansing," Con-

glose said as the other officer sank into the chair behind his desk. "You don't have to come to attention when I enter the room any more, do you?"

As if I did before, Lansing thought, but he said, "What can I do for you, sir?"

"You can tell me about your murder case. After all, we both belong to the CID."

"As I understood it, General Clayton put me directly in charge of homicide and you would handle narcotics and black market."

"True." Conglose nodded. "But I've heard that Colonel Harris is going to be transferred. Word has it that he'll be reassigned to Korea. That means the General will need a new executive officer."

"And you want to be the next XO?" Lansing guessed.

"I do have time and grade over you. After all, I've been a Major for over a year. I should be getting Lieutenant Colonel soon," Conglose said smugly.

"Field grade promotions can take a long time, Major," Lansing reminded, thinking Conglose was building his hopes unrealistically high.

"Not if my record is impressive enough."

"Does that mean you intend to get involved in *my* investigation?"

"Assist in your investigation."

I bet, Lansing thought. He said, "I haven't got very much so far."

"What do you have?"

Lansing briefly recapped the events that had occurred Saturday night and where each suspect was stationed, but he didn't mention his trip to Stowers' apartment. Conglose's face softened slightly when Lansing told him Warrant Officer Ventor was a pilot attached to Munson Barracks' flight section. Not long before, Conglose's best friend had been murdered by someone stationed at Munson. Lansing had captured the killer.

Conglose forced himself to reject the notion that he somehow owed anything to Lansing. *Catching killers is his job*, Conglose thought. *And you don't owe a man anything because he's doing his job*. "What else, Lansing?" he asked.

"The lab report hasn't come in yet, but I don't hold much hope that they'll be able to draw any definite conclusions about the bourbon bottle Ventor threw down the trash chute. Unfortunately the bottle broke when it hit the dumpster. Perhaps they'll come up with something from the paper seals."

"Sounds like Ventor's your man."

"Maybe. I plan to talk to him tomorrow. I also want to interrogate the other suspects after I've studied their two-o-ones."

Conglose frowned. "Isn't there anything else?"

"Nothing I can discuss at this time."

"What does that mean?" the

senior officer demanded. "You're withholding information from me, aren't you? You've done it before and you're doing it now!"

"If I am, I'm doing so for a good reason."

"It better be one that General Clayton can understand!" Conglose wheeled to head for the door.

"He understands!" Lansing snapped as he suddenly rose from his chair. "The general realizes if I'm to operate properly I have to be able to investigate individuals without revealing any incriminating information about them unless it pertains to the homicide I'm concerned with. If I develop a reputation as a stool pigeon, people will clam up whenever I ask what time it is."

"Your reputation!" Conglose snorted. "That means a lot to you, doesn't it?"

"My *job* means a lot to me," Lansing said, "and I'm going to do it the right way."

"You might not be doing it much longer!" Conglose warned as he stormed out of the office.

FINDING WO VENTOR proved more difficult than Lansing had assumed. He drove to Munson Barracks Monday morning, only to discover Vantor had flown a helicopter to Frankfort and wasn't expected to return until 1800 hours. Lansing returned to CID headquarters to find MSG Potter had slid his statement under Lansing's door. A note attached

by a paper clip explained that Potter would be at the construction site for the next three days.

The office seemed dismal without Wendy Davis, but she'd hastily packed the night before and caught a bus to Snyder Barracks. Colonel Fenton had managed to get her a temporary clerical job at Delta Battery's motor pool section.

Lansing reread the 201 files while he ate lunch at his office. The lab report on the bourbon bottle arrived. As Lansing had feared, the specialists were unable to confirm whether or not there had been ground glass in the liquor. Finally, at 1803 hours, Lansing called Munson Barracks and asked if Warrant Officer Vantor had returned.

"Yes, sir," a young SP4 in the flight department orderly room told him. "Mr. Vantor arrived earlier than anticipated. He's already left."

"Great," Lansing muttered.

"Major? I think I know where you might be able to find him. He goes to the NCO club almost every night."

"Munson's NCO club?"

"Yes, sir."

Lansing thanked him, hung up and quickly drove to his quarters to change into civilian clothing. A career soldier, Lansing felt awkward dressed in Levi's and a yellow turtleneck, but he'd attract unwanted attention if he entered an NCO club in uniform. His officer's insignia would seem to be made of neon lights. Remov-

ing the oak leaves from his overcoat, Lansing pulled it on and departed.

His sturdy Volkswagen trudged through the snow like a mechanical bulldog. Arriving at Munson, he asked directions to the NCO club. Finding the building, he parked nearby and entered the club. It was crowded for a Monday night. Non-coms shared the club with enlisted men. A dozen women (WACS, wives and German Nationals) were present. Couples bobbed wildly to disco music blaring from a jukebox.

Lansing found the warrant officer perched on a bar stool, sipping straight Scotch as he stared at the dancing figures without really seeing them. Sliding onto the stool next to Ventor, Lansing remarked. "I hope you aren't getting as intoxicated as you were last time we talked."

"It's still early," Ventor said dryly, turning toward Lansing. "You're that CID investigator, aren't you? Well, Major, did you get your killer yet?"

"I've got four ripe suspects."

"Do tell? And I'm one of them?"

Lansing nodded.

"I already told you I dumped that bourbon because I thought it was a bad bottle." Ventor shrugged. "Hell, I didn't have any reason to waste Dick. I'd known him since we were in 'Nam together."

Lansing decided to be blunt. "Is that when he started to black-

mail you?" he inquired.

"What?" Ventor's face fell for a moment, but he recovered quickly. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"I searched Stowers' apartment. I know about his extortion business."

"That's nuts," Ventor snorted, gulping down his Scotch.

"I've read your two-o-one. You were a chopper pilot in Vietnam. Stowers was the PFC mechanic assigned to your outfit. What happened?"

"Nothing."

"How about the air rescue mission at Ho Tay that failed because you didn't get your helicopter off the ground?"

"That's explained in my file." Ventor hesitated. "My chopper wouldn't fly because it had a busted rotor cable. A spec-four named Russell had lost the spare part. We didn't find the new one until it was too late."

"Yeah. PFC Stowers found it and Specialist Russell was killed by an NVA ambush, which made him a convenient scapegoat. An entire squad of marines died at Ho Tay because that chopper didn't reach them."

"Bartender! Give me a refill!" the warrant officer told the man behind the counter.

"Liquor won't solve your problem," Lansing commented. "Were you drunk that night in 'Nam? Did Stowers supply you with an alibi and demand favors in return?"

"That's crazy—"

"And did he keep his hold on you by threatening to expose you as an alcoholic, unfit for flight duty?"

"*Stop it!*" Vantor snapped, drawing the attention of half the patrons at the bar. "Listen, Major," he growled as he slid off his stool. "You're barking up the wrong tree!"

He walked unsteadily but quickly to the exit. The bartender was about to place Vantor's freshly filled glass on the counter as he saw the warrant officer's departing form.

"I never seen him walk away from a drink before," he remarked.

"Maybe it's time he started," Lansing said.

The major was about to climb from the stool to leave, but he stopped as he noticed one of the couples that had been prancing about on the dance floor approaching the bar. A young, handsome man escorted a stunning blonde dressed in a tight sheath dress that highlighted the curves of her body. Lansing didn't recognize her at first.

"Another screwdriver," the man told the bartender.

"I'll take my regular," he woman said.

"That's rum and Coke on the rocks?" the bartender asked.

"You got it."

"Good evening, Mrs. Potter," Lansing said flatly.

She turned slowly, staring at the CID officer for a moment before her mouth fell open in surprise.

"I know I look different in civvies," Lansing commented. "You look different too."

"Are — are you here on business?" Peggy asked slowly.

"I wanted to talk with Mr. Vantor," Lansing answered. "I want to talk to you, too" — he glanced at her escort — "but I can wait until your social arrangements are less crowded."

"No!" she exclaimed as the bartender handed her a fresh drink. "We can talk now. I was about to go home anyway. You can drive me back to my apartment and we can talk on the way over there."

"Wait a minute, Peg . . ." the young man began.

"This gentleman wants to see me about the man who died in my apartment the other night. He's Major Lansing from CID," she told him.

"CID?" The youth gasped. "Oh, well, I . . . I understand. Sure. Thanks for the dance," he said, bowing as he backed away from them like a Chinese coolie.

"Aren't you drinking?" she asked Lansing as she picked up her glass.

"I'm driving," he said.

Peggy downed the rum and Coke in two swallows, ice cubes rattling against her teeth. "Let me get my coat," she said.

Lansing tried to concentrate on the road as Peggy moved closer to him. She'd unbuttoned her coat as she entered the Volkswagen and she'd cuddled closer to Lansing ever since they'd left Munson Barracks. Her dress was so low-cut and tight it left little of her upper torso to the imagination. If she inhaled deeply, Lansing was sure the garment would come apart at the seams.

"Your husband is still at the construction site at O'Brian?" he asked, reminding her and himself that she was a married woman.

"He'll be there for the next couple of days," she replied, her voice suggesting she'd assumed he'd asked for a different reason.

"Guess you felt a need to get away from the housework tonight," he commented. "Munson is a long way from the housing district."

"I have friends there."

"Uh-huh," Lansing agreed dully. "Would you have called Richard Stowers a friend? How long did you know him?"

"About a year."

"How well did you know him?"

"He was really George's friend," she said, her breath warming his ear. "I like to make new friends. Don't you?"

"This road is pretty icy," he warned as her hand slipped inside his coat.

"But it's warm in here," she cooed as she kissed his neck.

Suddenly, she was all over him, kissing, hugging and caressing. She slid a leg into his lap, her tight skirt sliding up her thigh. *Is she crazy?* Lansing thought as he swerved to avoid an oncoming vehicle, hit a skid and almost drove into a snowbank. Bringing the Volkswagen to a halt at the side of the road, he put the brake on.

Her mouth closed on his. Her hands seemed to be everywhere at once, stroking his hair and body even as they guided his hands to caress her. Being a normal, healthy male, Lansing responded, but only for a moment. Calling upon years of discipline and will power, he gently but firmly disengaged her embrace.

"You're married," he told her as he held her at arm's length by her shoulders. "You're also a murder suspect. Besides, I know why you're doing this."

"You're not going to tell George?" she asked numbly.

"Let's talk about Stowers."

"I'll tell George you raped me!" she warned, desperation slurring her words.

"Okay." Lansing shrugged. "If you want to play that game, I'll just take you to the Nuremburg hospital and demand that a doctor examine you immediately. Unless you and your 'dancing partner' had a more eventful evening than I think you got around to, you'll have a tough time making that charge stick."

"You bastard!" she snarled, spitting in his face with anger.

"But I'm not as big a bastard as Stowers was, am I?"

"You can't tell George . . . " she whimpered, leaning back in the car seat, defeat draining her strength.

"I don't intend to," Lansing assured her, wiping the saliva from his face. "I know Stowers was blackmailing you and I can guess what he was using against you. Why don't you tell me about it?"

"What are going to do if I don't?" she asked, sobbing hopelessly. "Hit me? That's the answer men have for everything, isn't it?"

"Of course not," Lansing said softly. "Stowers is dead. He can't hurt you any more."

"But George can!" she exclaimed.

"He beats you?"

"He has. If he finds out I've been . . . *He'll kill me!*"

"Mrs. Potter," Lansing said, handing her a handkerchief. "I believe you had an affair with Stowers. He threatened to go to your husband if you didn't surrender to his demands. What was he blackmailing you for? Sexual favors?"

She nodded weakly. "And to help him meet other women. Wives and daughters of families on the economy. He even had two or three of us . . ." She buried her face in her hands with shame.

"Mrs. Potter." Lansing sighed. "Did you kill him?"

"Would you believe me if I said 'no'?"

"I'd be surprised if you said 'yes'." He grinned.

She smiled weakly. "I'm sorry about how I behaved."

"Forget it," Lansing replied as he shifted gears to drive on. *Sometimes this can be a lousy job*, he thought.

THE NEXT morning, Lansing was reading the most recent lab reports as Major Conglose entered his office. He glanced around with a puzzled expression on his circular face.

"Where's Davis?" he asked.

"Wendy has an assignment to take care of," Lansing replied. "What can I do for you, sir?"

"I want to know why you haven't solved this Stowers case yet."

"You know, you aren't the XO yet, Major," Lansing remarked.

"I've read the suspects' statements," Conglose declared. "It's obvious either the man who brought the bottle or the one who fixed the drink must be guilty. Surely, disqualifying one of them shouldn't take this long."

Lansing leaned back in his chair and sighed. "How do we know the ground glass wasn't already in the tumbler *before* Vantor brought in the bourbon or James prepared Stower's drink?"

"But how could Potter or his

wife know who'd get which glass? James *did* make the drink."

"Yeah. *After* Potter had put two beer mugs and two tumblers on the counter and gave Vantor one of the tumblers to pour himself a drink of Scotch. James then had only three glasses to choose from, a tumbler and two beer mugs."

"And you don't make a bourbon on the rocks in a beer mug," Conglose agreed with a disgusted wave of his hand. "So Potter is still a top suspect."

"They all are," Lansing said.

"What are these reports?" Conglose asked, glancing at several documents on Lansing's desk.

"The lab tests on the paper seal have been completed. A microscopic and a chemical analysis has determined that no additional traces of glue had been applied to the seal other than the amount used by the bottler for attaching the seal to the lid.

"The other reports are from the MP station. They confirm that on four separate occasions domestic violence occurred in the Potter apartment. Twice the MPs arrested Master Sergeant Potter for beating his wife. However, she didn't press charges. They usually don't."

"Battered wives?" Conglose asked.

Lansing nodded. "It makes me mad as hell, but it may have nothing to do with this case." With

some satisfaction he recalled how he'd thrashed Potter. If he'd known George beat up women, he would have kicked in Potter's teeth when he'd had the chance.

"What else have you got?"

"I've interviewed all the primary suspects except one — First Sergeant James."

"So? Why don't you interview him?"

"I don't know what questions to ask. According to his two-o-one he served with honors in Korea and Vietnam. He's due to retire next month and he's leaving Germany in two weeks."

"Well, what are you waiting for? A vision to tell you how to interview James?"

Lansing's telephone rang. As he reached for it, he said, "I may not need a vision. Good to hear from you, Wendy," he said into the mouthpiece. "How's work? . . . Yeah, I'll be glad when you get back, too . . . What else did you call for? . . . Oh? . . . Are they sure? . . . How do they know? . . . I see . . . I'll look into it. Thanks, Wendy. You may as well return to headquarters, I think I've got everything I'll need."

"What was that about?" Conglose demanded as Lansing hung up.

"I can't say, sir," Lansing replied as he moved across the room to the door.

"Where are you going?"

"I have to borrow some lock

picks from Doyle and draw a forty-five from the arms room."

"What for?"

"Picking locks and in case I have to shoot somebody," Lansing said as he went out the door.

"Lansing!" Conglose shouted at the retreating figure. "You get back here and tell me what's going on. Damn it!"

First Sergeant Harlon W. James passed the buck sergeant in the hallway of Delta Barracks. He nodded hello to the CQ and walked to the orderly room. It was 1920 hours and the battery commander and the clerks were gone. James removed a key ring and unlocked the door. Entering, he quickly relocked the door and moved between the clerks' desks to the window to be certain the blinds were closed.

Walking to his desk in the dark room with the ease of a man totally familiar with his surroundings, James slid into his chair and lit a small desk lamp. Unlocking the bottom drawer, he opened it. Reaching inside, he groped about, failed to find what he wanted, and began to claw inside the drawer.

James didn't notice the tall lean figure rise up from behind one of the clerks' desks until a bunch of magazines was tossed onto his desk. The harsh light of the desk lamp illuminated the muscular, naked young men decorating the cover of the publications as they fanned out.

"Is that what you're looking for?" Lansing asked.

James sat for a moment frozen by utter surprise and sudden terror. Then he shot out of his seat, snarling an obscenity as he seized his chair and raised it over his head. Lansing drew a Government - Issue 1911 Colt pistol, pointing it at James as he thumbed off the safety.

"Put it down!" Lansing said.

James lowered the chair to the floor, then fell to his knees and began to cry. *Yeah, this can be a lousy job*, Lansing thought. He stepped closer, shoving his .45 into the GI shoulder holster rig strapped to his chest.

"All I do is look at 'em," James sobbed. "That's all. Just look at them."

"And Stowers knew you're a homosexual and threatened to expose you."

"I'd be dishonorably discharged if the Army found out. After all these years, I'd be kicked out of the service in disgrace."

"So that's how he blackmailed you. Right?" Lansing said.

"How'd you find out? Did Stowers have something in his apartment about me?"

"No," Lansing replied. "Some men in your battery know you come in here every night. They know why, too. Once in a while you don't close the window blinds well enough."

James angrily slammed his fist on the desk top.

"Keep it down," Lansing aid. "I've got no legal right to be here. I sneaked in through a window and picked several locks for an unauthorized search. I had to do it that way or let a certain senior field-grade at CID, who is eager to turn his oakleaves from gold to silver, know why I wanted to investigate you this way. If you draw any attention, we could both be in a lot of trouble."

"How much more trouble can I be in? My military career is all I have. Now it's ruined."

"I don't think you quite understand. That's exactly *why* I went to all this trouble — to avoid exposing your secret. I'm not your judge, James. You've completed twenty-seven years of honorable service. I guess you deserve a break," Lansing said. "Unless you killed Richard Stowers."

"It wasn't me. Sometimes I thought about it, sure, but I swear I didn't do it."

"We'll see," Lansing replied flatly.

Lansing entered the Snyder Barracks service club and asked to use the telephone. He called his office at CID headquarters. Wendy Davis answered the phone on the other line.

"This is Lansing. I checked out that rumor. It was affirmative, but that doesn't mean James is guilty. So don't mention this business to anyone, especially Major Conglose. Agreed?"

"Of course, sir," she replied. "Is there anything I can do at this end?"

"No, not right now. Get some sleep and take tomorrow off."

"Okay," she said cheerfully. Her voice became more serious as she added, "Be careful driving. The bus I came back in nearly slid into a tree. The roads are just like a giant sheet of ice."

"Yeah, I know . . ." Lansing snapped his fingers suddenly as realization struck him. "Of course! *Ice!*"

"Are you feeling all right, sir?"

"Yeah, but I think I'll probably feel pretty crummy soon," he replied grimly.

"You've been out in this bad weather a great deal, sir. Maybe you caught a head cold."

"I'll have something in about an hour," Lansing stated. "If you see Conglose, tell him I'll have Richard Stowers' killer before midnight."

Knocking on the apartment door, Lansing unzipped his field jacket as he waited. Peggy Potter, clad once again in a drab house-dress and her hair bound in a schoolmarm bun, opened the door.

"Hello, Major," she said, surprised to see him.

"Good evening," Lansing replied. "Has George returned yet?"

"No," she smiled. "Please come in, Major."

Lansing entered. She stared at the butt of the .45 peeking from under his jacket. "You always carry a gun?"

"Sometimes," he answered, rubbing his hands together. "It's cold out there."

"Would you like a cup of coffee to warm you up?" she asked, moving to the kitchenette.

"I'd rather have something a bit stronger." He grinned weakly.

"Oh?" She raised her eyebrows. "What do you drink?"

"I'll have whatever you're having," he said, removing his field jacket and draping it over the back of a chair.

"I see," Peggy said softly, unpinning her hair to allow it to fall to her shoulders. "What made you change your mind about getting involved with a married woman?"

"I read the MP reports dealing with Sergeant Potter's habit of mistreating you. I decided you don't really have a husband." He approached the kitchenette as she placed two glasses on the counter, "Besides, you *are* a beautiful woman."

"Thank you." She smiled as she removed the lid from the ice bucket and dropped two cubes into each glass. "I hope you like rum and Coke."

"Maybe you'd better fix both drinks for yourself," Lansing said. "You might need them after what I have to tell you."

"What are you talking about?"

she demanded as she hurried from behind the counter to face him.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Potter." He sighed heavily. "You killed Richard Stowers."

"That's absurd!" she snapped. "I never touched the glass he drank from that night. I never touched the bottle."

"You didn't have to," Lansing said grimly, "According to our lab findings there was no additional glue on the seal on the bourbon bottle cap. In order to put anything in the liquor, Vantor would have had to remove the seal to open the bottle. He couldn't have resealed the cap without using glue."

Lansing paced as he continued. "According to all of your statements, James prepared the drink. He could have put the ground glass in the bourbon. However, he couldn't have known Stowers would tell him to fix the drink. Besides, James is getting out of USAEUR next week. He'd be out of Stowers' clutches then. So, why kill him?"

"Your husband could have put the lethal contents in the tumbler before James prepared the drink. He'd given Vantor the other tumbler, leaving James only one to choose from. But he didn't give Vantor the glass until Vantor asked for it. Once again: how could he predict what another man would do?"

"And how am I supposed to have done it?" she asked, her

hands gesturing desperately.

"You made the ice cubes." Lansing replied, moving to the counter to pick up one of the tumblers. "Glass and ice are both semi-transparent. No one would have noticed glass fragments frozen inside the ice cubes." He rattled the ice inside the tumbler as he spoke. "Ventor drinks his Scotch straight, George and James were drinking beer, but Stowers drank his bourbon on the rocks. The ice cubes melted and he swallowed your deadly surprise."

"That's idiotic." She forced a small laugh. "I drink rum and Coke on the rocks. I would have drunk ground glass as well."

"I know what your favorite drink is," Lansing reassured her. "The bartender at the Munson NCO club fixed your *regular* for you. But I also remember looking into the glasses on the card table in this very room on Saturday night. There were no ice cubes in your drink that night. Only Stowers drink still had a piece of ice in it."

"You don't understand. You don't know what it was like." Her face took on a tragic expression. "He deserved it."

"Did he ever make you drink ground glass?" Lansing asked.

"He treated me like dirt. He was becoming more sadistic, more cruel. You don't know what a man like that can put a woman through. I couldn't go to George, he would

kill me. He has a terrible temper. I didn't lie about that."

"I know," Lansing told her. "But I also know an innocent person could have been convicted for your crime."

"I thought it would look like an accident. I thought the investigation would assume some glass chips had gotten into the bourbon when it was bottled," she said. "I should have confessed when the MP accused Andy of murder. I just didn't have the courage."

"I believe you," Lansing said. "You've been distraught, abused by your husband and the man you had an affair with. Maybe the court will be lenient."

An idea caused her eyes to light up as she moved closer to him. "But you don't have to tell anyone I did it!"

"You'd better get your coat, Mrs. Potter," Lansing told her. "We'll contact your husband from CID headquarters."

"Listen, Major . . ." She was pleading now. "If you forget all about this, I'll reward you. I'll leave George. I'll move in with you. You aren't like those other men. I'll stay with you and be your woman."

"No thanks," Lansing said, not really angered because he realized her offer of sexual favors was her last desperate attempt to avoid punishment. "I make it a policy never to live with anyone I wouldn't trust to make my coffee in the morning."

Stiff Competition

by JOHN BALL

JOHN BALL was born in Schenectady, New York — "a good place to leave," he says — in 1911, and after college became a commercial pilot. During World War II he was a flight instructor in the U.S. Army Air Corps for four years. Later, he became music editor and feature writer for the Brooklyn Eagle, columnist for the New York World-Telegram, broadcaster for a Washington, D.C., radio station, and lecturer for New York's Hayden Planetarium.

Moving to California, Ball became public relations director for the Institute of Aerospace Sciences. His mystery writing career began in 1965 with the publication of In the Heat of the Night, the first Vigil Tibbs story, which was awarded the Mystery

Writers of America's Edgar as best first novel of the year. The movie version won five Academy Awards, including the one for best picture, in 1967. Ball has worked closely with the Los Angeles Police Department, most notably when his own Encino home was burgled and his valuable collection of jade statuettes stolen.

Beginning with this issue, John Ball's reviews of the cream of the current crime fiction crop, and other books of unusual interest to our readers, will be a regular monthly feature of Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine.

DODD MEAD AND COMPANY, the publishers of the late Dame Agatha Christie, are now offering her works in a uniform set called

The Greenway Edition. These volumes are nicely designed and produced in real cloth bindings. The ones we have seen are priced at \$6.95 each. The typesetting is not uniform, but otherwise this matched set, which includes more than twenty titles to date, is an excellent memorial tribute to the great lady of crime and a good way to acquire titles that have sometimes been hard to find.

★ ★ ★

Hillary Waugh, master of the police procedural, has departed from this form to create a suspense novel that should make a smashing motion picture. *Madman At My Door* is the chilling tale of a lunatic who, after eight year's confinement, is released as cured. As soon as he is free, he begins a long-planned campaign to avenge himself against an innocent schoolteacher whose wife he has killed and who, in defending her, had shot off the madman's groin. A brash reporter gets into the act as the suspense mounts relentlessly. The deceptions of the lunatic, his insidious scheming and the horrors of his twisted mind add up to a nail biter of the first order. Not for the faint hearted, otherwise not to be missed. *Doubleday* \$7.95

★ ★ ★

Asterisk Destiny by Campbell

Black is an espionage story that is both exceptionally well written and built around an idea that seems to be entirely new. Somewhere there is an unknown project called *Asterisk* so secret that several people have died to keep it totally under wraps. A White House aide is driven to probe the problem and the further he enters into the area of *Asterisk*, the more desperate his situation becomes. The solution is not a conventional one and the idea is dazzling. It's also extremely timely. An exceptional job in every way. *William Morrow and Co.* \$9.95

★ ★ ★

The Edgar Awards Committee will also want to take a look at *The Unexploded Man* by Leslie Watkins. This is a terrifying chiller written by an author who did his homework thoroughly. He was once himself arrested as a spy in Uganda and threatened with death and has also undergone other perilous experiences in real life. The British journalist about whom the story revolves is kidnapped and tortured to force him to reveal inner secrets of the government to which he is privy. That's the beginning. There is a memorable escape and a great deal more action in this unexpectedly good first novel. Some far-out dramatics but, despite this, a memorable debut. *William Morrow and Co.* \$8.95

★ ★ ★

Although the gimmick is visible quite early in the book, *Azor!* by Jim Henaghan is a very good thriller laid in Spain. The writing is slick rather than in depth, but the story telling is first rate. This is the fifth book in a series about private eye Jeff Pride. The first four titles appeared in paperback by Bantam under the pseudonym Archie O'Neill. St. Martins Press \$8.95

★ ★ ★

Peter Dickinson can usually be relied upon to come through with a good story; he certainly lives up to expectations in *Annerton Pit*. This is a pure and timely suspense tale about two brothers, the younger of whom is blind. With their grandfather they are captured by terrorists and confined in an old abandoned mine. The total blackness creates its own terror, but under these conditions the blind boy has a real advantage. Excellently written, this is a first-rate addition to the literature. The reader lives every minute of the peril in the sealed pit, where every kind of hazard is hidden in the total darkness. Atlantic Little Brown \$6.95.

★ ★ ★

The Detectives by Frank Smyth and Myles Ludvig is an oversize

book devoted to "crime and detection in fact and fiction." It is a lavishly illustrated book which contains a brief overview of the founding of formal detection, some coverage of the major fictional detectives, and then launches into true crime which makes up the greater part of the book. The many illustrations add greatly, including blow-ups of fingerprint evidence and other similar displays. For the crime addict (armchair variety), a thoroughly interesting volume. Lippincott \$7.95 (soft cover).

★ ★ ★

Lastly, there is an important new book out for fans and admirers of Raymond Chandler. It is devoted to a series of essays about Chandler and his work by a group of authors who enjoy very high individual reputations in their respective fields. It is a fortunate book indeed that can offer contributions by John Houseman, Michael Gilbert, Jacques Barzun, Julian Symons, Patricia Highsmith, and others of similar calibre. *The World of Raymond Chandler* also includes a bibliography of his work and a brief biography of each of the contributors. The whole was edited by Miriam Gross who previously edited *The World of George Orwell*. An excellent contribution to the literature. A and W Publishers. \$9.95

Catlady

by JERRY JACOBSON



Cat Burglar, Cat Burglar — Who's Got the Cat Burglar?

SCARPELLI, slumped down behind the wheel of the unmarked, put on a face of sardonic evil and wit so dry wood could be sanded on it and brought out his Jack Nicholson. "Listen, cheesehead, show your stealthy little weasel body so we can play a little hardball and I can go back to the stationhouse with your neck on

one of my belt loops and scarf off a commendation from the captain."

He'd been working on his Nicholson for weeks. He'd seen *Chinatown* six times, two a sitting, until gradually the sound moved to the top of his palate and took roost there and in his nose for the nasal

twang. He had it nailed like a dip in a dead end alley, had perfected it to such a high art he was now becoming convinced Jack Nicholson himself was doing it all wrong.

That's what usually became of you on solitary stakeouts. You went a little crazy and became a bigtime Hollywood impressionist without moving a step in time or space. But if your brain could leave the job behind, it really didn't matter if your inert cop body was rooted to one hemoroidally crummy spot.

Actually, over the past six stagnant weeks, only Scarpelli had been immobile. His unmarked, like a homeless feline, had moved from street to street, avenue to drive, in the fashionable suburban community of Laurelhurst in a futile search for a cat burglar. Scarpelli and Carmine Foley had split the neighborhood down the middle north-to-south, and now were going halves after a shadow on the wind who'd made over two dozen homes his private midnight supermarket and Laurelhurst's streets, alleys and backyards his intricate set of escape routes. Neither Scarpelli nor Foley had glimpsed him, let alone come within inches of a flying tackle. His pattern was as unpredictable as an agoraphobic mouse in a maze. He was either a seventh son taking his charmed life at its floodtide, or had very early made both unmarked cars and the slit-eyed, unshaven, Hoagy-eating

cops behind their wheels, and was working through a short life of crime laughing his face off.

It was three-thirty on a Tuesday morning. Fog was dropping over this valley community in a thick veil. Mr. Catburglar would love it like a Tinkertoy safe that could be punched open with simply a menacing glare.

Scarpelli snatched up his mike, switched his unit from the supreme dullness of car calls to their Tac frequency and roused Foley.

"He's going to hit tonight, Foley."

"Sez you, Scarpelli. You got any sandwiches left? I'll drive over. You got any liverwurst?"

"He loves the fog, this guy. He goes berserk over rain. I tell you, he's coming out tonight, Foley. He can't resist the rotten weather. He's a foul-weather thief."

"Big, crashing deal. He's probably hit already, got his feet propped up in front of the fire counting his small-change jewelry and a handful of cash. He's made us, Scarpelli. He made us the first night. It's a real laugh for him."

"Tonight, we get lucky," said Scarpelli.

"Tonight, we get cold and hungry, and bored from nothing to look at because the flaming fog don't want us to. And then we can treat ourselves to more ribbing back at the stationhouse. You know what they call us now, don't you, Scarpelli?"

"Talk. I don't listen to talk."

"They call us the Butt Patrol."

"What's in a name?" said Scarpelli and punched off the air.

Foley might have struck on a salient point when he said their midnight shopper had made their stakeout and was hitting the neighborhood early, long before Scarpelli and Foley came on duty at midnight. Yet Scarpelli wasn't shaking a hunch which had settled into his brain for the duration, a notion which told him this guy was too wily and cautious to hit when his victims were not yet into their deepest sleep.

Thibadeaux Drive was disappearing before his eyes. The fog, thickening like a pot of minestrone under a week's simmering, had drawn down to below the rooftops of homes. In his mind's eye, Scarpelli saw their burglar's excitement and greed grow as he watched its steady descent from behind the windows of his own home, laying out his lock-picks and punches on a kitchen table, slipping into his soft-soled shoes and calfskin gloves, going carefully over his maps, picking out his newest victim. The fog had set his irreversible plan into motion and he was helpless to stop it and his compulsions.

He hadn't hit this section of Laurelhurst yet, a belt of streets and drives unmarred by map pins on their tactical map at the station-house. Thibadeaux Drive, Fircrest

Drive, Dogwood Lane, Lake Forest Street, Brian, VanPelt, Shorewood. They were switching unmarked cars every night now, throwing Heinie Schatz, the motor pool dispatcher, into fits of confusion and rage, and leaving the Vice and Narc detectives with ungassed vehicles. They were even switching city license plates for their own every night and back again in the morning. Very soon, Scarpelli expected they would move into garbage cans with holes bored in them to see through and the bottoms cut out so that every few hours the location could be moved.

Scarpelli found himself dozing off to sleep. When he shocked himself awake, it was four a.m. Foley wasn't answering his radio unit. Scarpelli couldn't be entirely sure he hadn't crawled off to some all-night coffee shop somewhere. Scarpelli couldn't blame him. Hell, this Watch on the Rhine foolishness was beginning to get him a little blue as well.

AND THEN, just when it seemed that dawn would be the only significant event to which he could look forward, a radio dispatcher was dispassionately informing Scarpelli and anyone else officially awake and eavesdropping that the Laurelhurst cat burglar had struck once again, at a home at 5232 Dogwood Lane. Scarpelli snatched up his street map and lit up the

unit's interior. Dogwood was just two blocks east of Thibadeaux, the 5200-block three to the south. Hell, he wasn't going to see a fleeing thief in this fog, must less collar him.

He switched to the Tac frequency to learn whether Foley might want to join him in a futile game of blind man's bluff, but Foley wasn't taking any calls. Likely he was still pinching the cabooses of fleeing waitresses and jamming burgers down his throat. Scarpelli spat out a brief tirade of swear words, then kicked on his engine and lights. He moved out from the curb, feeling like a guy in a wetsuit doing the crawl through a bowl of split-pea soup.

Parked cars showed him only their tires in the crushing fog. He found the 5200 block and turned right. He went two more blocks, stopped, and walked up to a street sign to see what it said. Dogwood Lane. Great; geography by a microscope.

He turned right again down Dogwood. Midway down the block, a house on the left gave off an aura of hazed light.

Scarpelli found the curb, found the walk, found the house to be the scene of the crime, 5232 Dogwood Lane, a nice, unpretentious two-story Spanish stucco. The door was answered by a middle-aged man in a cocoa silk robe.

"Police?"

"Lieutenant Scarpelli." The man's eyes held more than a little

amazement. In its demographic group, the city had one of the worst response-times in the nation, something a bit over eighteen minutes. Scarpelli and every other city cop knew that when the response-time to a crime exceeded seven minutes, no criminal ever got caught. With this one, thirty seconds to respond wasn't going to help them any more than thirty years.

"You came quick, Lieutenant."

"Well, we've been out there five weeks now. Around the corner, down the block, halfway up the alley . . ."

"I hadn't realized . . ."

"That's the way we like to work it," Scarpelli told him. "If you realize, your neighbor realizes, the bad guy realizes, and suddenly it's on the six o'clock news. May I come in?"

"Yes, I'm sorry, Lieutenant, of course."

The victim's name was DeVries. His wife sat huddled at one corner of a Queen Anne couch, looking like a picture of feminine vulnerability and submissiveness.

"The wife," DeVries indicated with a nod, and Mrs. DeVries winced a return smile.

The house's middle-class exterior belied the wealth of antique furnishings by which Scarpelli abruptly found himself surrounded: ladderback oak chairs with elegant rush seats, brass candlesticks on a mahogany mantel, lush Oriental carpets.

Scarpelli felt he'd taken a wrong turn looking for a garage sale and had walked into an antiques auction. On a wall next to the fireplace, a two-foot-square painting on hinges had been thrown aside, as was a steel safe door behind it. Scarpelli walked across the living room and took a peek inside the safe. It had been swept cleaner than a political ward the day after the outs got in.

"I've made a list, Lieutenant," Scarpelli heard DeVries say at his back. "Collection of silver dollars going back to 1804, all re-strikes. Some commemoratives, a diamond pendant and matching earrings, passports, insurance policies, wills, stock certificates . . . bonds which can be cashed by anyone anywhere in the world upon demand."

"Never have a wall safe installed behind a painting or a picture or a wall hanging," Scarpelli said. "It's the first place they look."

"I don't appreciate irony in the face of calamity, Lieutenant. Then, just where *should* valuables be kept?"

"Well, if you're going to be headstrong enough to turn your back on banks," said Scarpelli, "I suggest coffee cans buried no less than five feet deep in a scattered pattern in your backyard. That way, you'll hear the digging long before the digger hits paydirt."

"I do believe you're serious."

"Got a great uncle who's been

doing it for decades," said Scarpelli, with a straight face. "He took a cruise a few years back. Took him six months just to locate the boat fare, but at least he had it when he wanted it."

—"Can we just get on with this, Lieutenant?"

Why were people so humorless these days? Scarpelli could remember the days when a cop's jokes made the medicine of a burglary or a robbery go down with the ease of a spoonful of honey. Now, you uttered one word that couldn't be found in the criminal codes or a procedures manual, and eight hours later you found yourself standing at attention in front of some glowering assistant chief who ripped your stripes off one by one with his eyes.

Scarpelli decided to go with the humorless approach and took out his notepad and made a list of the stolen objects.

"Okay, Mr. DeVries," he went on, "just tell me in your own words what happened."

"My wife and I were upstairs in bed. I was dozing off and my wife was reading. She nudged me awake and said she thought she heard a noise downstairs. I tell her it's the wind. She tells me I'm forgetting the neighborhood has been burglarized a dozen times lately and that our number just came up. I tell you, Lieutenant, I'm going downtown and buy a pistol. First thing in the morning.

A *big* pistol. A .38-caliber police special, maybe a sawed-off shotgun."

"I'd really advise against doing that," Scarpelli told him. "If your burglar turns out to be unarmed—and most of them prefer to be weaponless—then you're going to have a hard time convincing a judge and jury he was threatening you and not just your personal property. That's if you don't kill him. If you kill him, you'll more than likely go to prison for murder."

"There are ways around all the complexities in the law," said DeVries. "You want proof our lives are in jeopardy? All right, the next time I'll put one slug through his heart and one in the ceiling. You tell *me*, Lieutenant, how a jury or a police investigation is going to determine which shot was fired first? The one pumped into the ceiling was a warning shot to stop him from coming at me. And believe me, if I drop him on my back porch, I'm going to drag him into the kitchen and claim forcible entry. What it boils itself down to, Lieutenant, is the meek just quit standing around waiting to inherit the earth, because when the greedy and the criminal get through, there won't be anything left to inherit!"

Scarpelli closed his eyes briefly. In the face of this tidal wave of public arming, one cop's admonition was going to get about as far as an ecology freak leaping

from the stands to try and halt the start of the Indy 500 by waving his arms in the face of fifty onrushing racing machines.

"Just keep the cylinder on an empty chamber and the safety locked?" he told DeVries finally, and let his admonitions go at that.

"Take my word for it, Lieutenant. One of these midnight bastards has to be made an example. A deceased example. *Then*, you watch the neighborhood burglaries fall off to zilch."

"Can we get back to the events of this morning, Mr. DeVries?"

"Okay, okay. So, I went downstairs with a golf club from an upstairs closet. A great weapon if you're beating at the side of a Max-Fli on a par five. I poke my head around a corner of the first floor hallway and I can see the door to the safe standing wide open. I figure he's hit and gone. I wait there a minute while I drum up the courage to go into the living room. Meantime, my wife has followed me downstairs."

Mrs. DeVries had a solid reason for doing that. "John, I wasn't *about* to stay in that bedroom all alone. What if the burglar's next stop is my jewelry box and a few dresser drawers? No, sir. I'm sticking close to the guy with the golf club."

"I can't quibble with that kind of logic," said Scarpelli. "What happened next, Mr. DeVries?"

"We're still hanging in the hallway, searching for a little

bravery. There isn't a sound coming from the living room. All right, so if he's trapped in there, we've got a whirling dervish on our hands the instant he discovers the only route of escape happens to be over our dead bodies."

During DeVries' dramatic narrative, Scarpelli kept a separate eye on his wife. She seemed to be listening attentively enough, and yet her eyes were suffering, crying out to speak under some unspeakable restraint.

"Go on, Mr. DeVries," said Scarpelli. "What happened then?"

"Then . . . all holy hell broke loose. We heard this low scream come from the living room and this figure came out of the darkness on the full run. I moved back out of the doorway, keeping myself between my wife and this maniac burglar. He bolted past us, turned down the hallway and bolted out the front door."

"Did you see a weapon of any kind?" Scarpelli asked.

"No," said DeVries. "But I wasn't going to try any flying tackles to find out. I'm not going to get myself or my wife killed when everything I own is insured. Let him have it."

"Did either of you catch a good look at him?" Scarpelli asked. "Mrs. DeVries?"

Here was her legitimate chance to speak, and Scarpelli was disappointed in her response. "I . . . was shielded by my husband," she

said. "All I saw was this darkly clad figure flying towards the front door."

"Dark clothing?" prompted Scarpelli.

"Dark pants or jeans, dark-colored jacket, a black knit cap of some kind." The woman brushed some strands of hair from her face, though it was difficult for Scarpelli to tell if they were real or imaginary. "You know, Lieutenant. Just the kind of dark clothing you would expect a burglar to wear."

Her husband nodded in agreement.

SCARPELLI CLOSED his notebook, wondering if Foley was enjoying his fat, overflowing sandwich.

"Well, that's about all I have to . . ."

"Would you like some coffee, Lieutenant?" asked Mrs. DeVries suddenly. "I know it's cold out there and surveillances can become gruelling things. It won't take me a minute to make."

"Lillian, I'm sure the lieutenant has his reports to make," said DeVries.

"No, no, it's nothing that can't wait," Scarpelli told them. There was a faint urgency in the woman's invitation, and Scarpelli wasn't about to pass it up. She had something very definite to tell him, and he was convinced she wanted it told in

private. "By now, your burglar is sitting on the floor in his own house examining his haul. With these neighborhood thieves, you never miss by an eyelash. You either get your bad guy or you miss by a mile. I'd appreciate some fresh coffee, Mrs. DeVries."

During the brief wait, Scarpelli and DeVries exchanged the shallow philosophies of weather, crime's encroachment upon the defenseless suburbs, juvenile delinquency and the introduction of excessive nitrates into grass fertilizers.

"Excuse me, Mr. DeVries. Think I'll just pop into the kitchen to see how that coffee's coming along."

"Tell my wife I'll pass on mine," said DeVries. "I'm going to have enough trouble getting to sleep this morning as it is."

"Sure thing."

Lillian DeVries jumped with a start when Scarpelli entered the kitchen. Her eyes still held some unspeakable notion held in abeyance, as they swung toward the door through which Scarpelli had come. With a slight shake of his head, he told her the man from whom she was withholding her secret was not following. The woman's eyes seemed to relax.

"I had the feeling you wanted to tell me something out there, Mrs. DeVries."

The woman was having trouble fitting the coffeemaker's plug into the socket. When she turned,

Scarpelli could easily read the grief in her eyes.

"Lieutenant," she said in a low voice "I saw who it was."

"I thought you might have," Scarpelli told her.

"And so did my husband."

"Then why didn't he speak up?"

"Because he'd been made either a fool or an accomplice by her."

"Her? You mean your burglar wasn't a man?"

"Her name is Courtney Wyatt," said Mrs. DeVries, carefully dipping the woman's name in venom.

"She lives only a block up on Dogwood, at 5426. She's divorced, which gives her the pick of the neighborhood when it comes to partners and playmates."

"And you're trying to tell me she's responsible for all these burglaries?"

"If she isn't dazzling them with sex or brilliance, you can bet she's baffling them with bullcrap. Gets safe combinations somehow, or sweet-talks her way into cute little conspiracies at out of the way restaurants and rendezvous. How do I come to that conclusion? Do you know Pim's Oyster Grotto on Highway 16? One afternoon I was on the raw edge from shopping and running my husband's errands. Run here, run there, do this, pick up that. I was on my way back from the city, spotted the restaurant and decided I deserved a treat.

"I got a treat, all right. I got treated to a glimpse of the two of them cozied up at a corner table, wrapped like a couple of snakes in heat. I don't know if this is a solo Mata Hari act, or if Courtney Wyatt is doing burglaries under contract for insurance splits. But I do know she's the catlady of Laurelhurst, working a sweet little scam for every nickel it's worth."

"And you'd be willing to pick her out in a line-up if she's charged," Scarpelli said.

"Lieutenant, I know the face I saw out in that hallway," came the cold voice. "And I know my testimony in a courtroom might be inadmissible when it becomes known I'm the aggrieved side of a very complex triangle, but I'm willing to take my chances on that part of it. That woman doesn't belong in this neighborhood. She belongs on a rabbit farm."

A prime suspect tossed directly into his lap. Scarpelli praised the cop god of happenstance and blind luck. At that point, DeVries popped his head through the kitchen door. If he thought a private meeting of minds was taking place, his expression gave no indication.

"How's the coffee coming?"

His wife plunged her head and eyes into a copper breadbox. "I think I have some English muffins here." So soon after becoming an informant, she wasn't up to eye-contact with the man upon whom

she had just informed.

"Have to take a rain check on the coffee and muffins, I'm afraid," Scarpelli told them. "Procedure says we have to cruise the neighborhood of any burglary for a prescribed period after its perpetration. It never gets us any cigars, but we've got to work off all the knee-jerk reactions nonetheless. Don't bother, I'll let myself out. We'll be contacting you again in a couple of days."

THE FOG still lay in a thick menace on Dogwood Lane. Scarpelli finally connected with Foley in his unit.

"Got us burgers, Scarpelli. With mozzarella and sausage slices."

"Well, I got us a suspect for our hopscotch burglar. If you'll wipe the mozzarella and mayonnaise off your chin, meet me at 5426 Dogwood Lane. Suspect's name is Courtney Wyatt, white female."

"Armed?"

"And then some, judging from her wide-ranging conquests," he told Foley and punched off the radio.

Scarpelli crawled through the fog one block north. Courtney Wyatt's house was a demure, unprepossessing shake bungalow. Its living room was lit, as were lights at the rear. A bedroom, Scarpelli guessed, where a sneak thief was hurriedly preparing for bed just in case any swift

repercussions came to visit her doorstep.

Scarpelli rang the bell. The chimes struck softly and seductively.

The door was drawn back suddenly. Scarpelli caught a whiff of musk and incense that was either jasmine or diluted arsenic.

"Good evening. I'm a police officer."

"Good evening. I'm desperate for sleep."

The hair was long and honey-blond, so much of it a pair of hands could become lost in its depths without a roadmap. Courtney Wyatt wore a peach nightgown whose material ceased just above the knees. A matching robe seemed to have been chosen with the same brevity in mind. She was barefoot and the hair looked more in place than tousled from a restless night of sleep.

"Identification, please?" said Courtney Wyatt from behind a door that was still chained.

Scarpelli produced his shield and I.D. card and the chain was removed.

The living room was furnished with plexiglass tables and futuristic leather furniture all in white. The carpets were white shag, their pile ankle deep. This certainly wasn't the destitute divorcee the newspapers and magazines always portrayed as an unfortunate survivor beginning all over again in a semi-squalor. The trappings looked new to Scarpelli

— definitely not booty gleaned as community property.

"What's the problem, Lieutenant?" Courtney Wyatt asked.

"There's been a burglary in the neighborhood, Ms. Wyatt."

"You'll pardon me, Lieutenant, if I fail to display any surprise at hearing that news. Laurelhurst has had an epidemic of them lately."

"We've had some recurring troubles in the area, yes." Scarpelli took out his notebook and entered the time of the interview: 4:22 a.m. "Have you been up all morning, Ms. Courtney?"

"Were I an insomniac, Lieutenant, don't you think I'd dress a bit more comfortably for it? I've been up only a few minutes. I couldn't sleep."

Scarpelli made a note of that statement and also a note indicating Ms. Wyatt was presently having a drink, perhaps to steady her inner upheaval at this morning's near-miss and her apprehension. Outwardly, she was an iceberg drifting through time and space, completely unperturbed by the presence of anyone or anything.

"Do you live alone, Ms. Wyatt?"

A foxy grin flashed on the nicely full lips and then vanished. "Lieutenant, I live alone, but I try never to *be* alone, if you field my meaning."

"Then you're single."

"Divorced. I have two sons.

"They live with my ex-husband, whose life I hope is being made more unbearable by their presence."

"Then you work?"

"I'm the assistant head cashier at Fidelity Mutual Savings and Loan in Laurelhurst Village and I'm taking training as a loan and mortgage officer. I've been there three years, I have never been late or absent without justification and I do not embezzle."

Scarpelli continued to write while a corner of his brain wrestled with the question of where all of this woman's collected burglary acquisitions might be hidden. Not out in plain view, that was certain; but on the premises, very likely. The woman shouldn't be precon-
demned, Scarpelli reminded himself. But neither should she be mistaken for an innocent simply upon her word.

"Are you scheduled to work tomorrow, Ms. Wyatt?"

"I'm at the bank every weekday morning at nine a.m.," she told him. "Clocks depend upon me for their punctuality."

The touchy thing here was, Scarpelli was finding himself empty-handed when it came to reasonable cause to conduct a search of the woman's house without a warrant. True, he had an eyewitness, but one who might reasonably be judged prejudiced under extramarital circumstances.

"Is this going to take much longer, Lieutenant?" came the bored voice of Courtney Wyatt. "The rest of the sane world is fast asleep, and I don't like to be out of step with the rest of the world."

"Just one more question, Ms. Wyatt."

"Ask it."

"I'd like a look into your bedroom," Scarpelli said. "I won't disturb anything, nor will I invade the sanctity of any bureau drawers or closets."

"Without a search warrant, Lieutenant, a look is all you'll get. How long is this look expected to take?"

"Only a minute."

"By that I take you to mean sixty seconds."

He had to give her unqualified credit. She could paint an adversary into a corner like a Rembrandt.

"Sixty seconds, Ms. Wyatt."

Courtney Wyatt rose from the couch, the sly grin still delicately touching her lips, one of the devil's angels abroad in the night. "Come this way, Lieutenant," she said.

It proved to be a bedroom that was typically female: frilly, fluffy and furry. Scarpelli noted bedclothing in disarray and pillowcases that looked slept upon.

"Satisfied, Lieutenant?"

"Not entirely. But I'm steering clear of lawsuits and arrest infractions."

"Good thinking," said Courtney Wyatt. "Probable cause sometimes can be so difficult to come by. I empathize with your delicate predicament. You still have fifteen seconds left of your prescribed minute. Better take them. I feel certain this sort of chance will never come again for you."

Then, just when Scarpelli was beginning to feel the pain brushing the tips of his shoes, the hunch struck him. And it complied with every known statute. He walked up to the bed, spent the remainder of his precious seconds there, and then turned. This time, he wore the thin smile of a fox.

"You'll forgive me, Ms. Wyatt. But it kind of looks as if I've just discovered our probable cause."

"What?"

"In clear and simple terms, Ms. Wyatt, you are under arrest for suspicion of burglary. You have the right to remain silent, you have the right to the presence of an attorney, and if you have no attorney, one will be. . . ."

"I am *what*?"

" . . . appointed for you and in your presence before any questions are asked."

Scarpelli shouldn't have been reading from his Miranda card, because his preoccupation with it allowed Courtney Wyatt to snake a hand into a bureau drawer and extract a small nickel-plated pistol. The eyes were no

longer playful or sly. They had changed to the pure animal eyes of a creature threatened but determined by her instincts to become a survivor and not a victim.

"Your pistol and your car keys, Lieutenant. Toss them on the bed and then step backward."

Scarpelli complied meekly. Courtney Wyatt slipped into a pair of heavy clogs, snatched up a heavy coat from a hook on the inside of a closet door without turning her back of her pistol, and grabbed up her purse.

"I'm afraid I've been forced to travel very light, but then I'm used to fresh starts. You'll forgive me if I don't drop you a postcard from my new destination. Postmarks are so terribly revealing. Goodbye, Lieutenant."

There was no following after a desperate woman with two pistols, so Scarpelli bided this time in Courtney Wyatt's bedroom listening for the sound of a car engine catching and revving off into the night. Damn the fog! It would be Courtney Wyatt's conspirator and Scarpelli's second adversary. He glanced down and saw the poetic paint sloshed rudely over the tops of his shoes.

The second hand on his watch swept the dial twice. Funny. Scarpelli should have heard an engine's impetuous roar by now. But the silence didn't cause him to break his five-minute

rule where fleeing suspects were concerned. A man found it difficult to think straight or clearly when his head wasn't affixed to his shoulders.

There was a polite rapping at the closed bedroom door. Scarpelli recoiled. Had she forgotten something? Scarpelli took out his wallet and removed the bills. It wouldn't hurt to show he was cooperative.

Foley, when he poked his head in, looked like a pleased and adept Manx who'd just had a plump canary for lunch.

"Scarpelli? I got the burgers. No bacon, but they got sausage slices. They substituted grated parmesan for the mozzarella."

All Scarpelli could see was Foley and a brief tether of handcuffs. "Who you got on the other end of those?" he asked.

Foley opened the door fully, to reveal an enraged Courtney Wyatt. She didn't look to be speaking to anyone present just at the moment.

"She was coming from the house toting a nickel-plated little pistol," Foley explained. "She hit this place, too?"

"No. She lives here."

"Then what's she doing hauling a loaded pistol around in plain sight?"

"She's our catlady," said Scarpelli. "She made the mistake of becoming trapped in her own backyard."

Foley's eyes roll around in their

sockets a couple of turns. "You mean she's the one that did *all of them*? The whole shebang?"

"Looks like," said Scarpelli.

Courtney Wyatt looked sufficiently composed now to speak. She drew a deep, settling breath. "Lieutenant, may I be so bold as to ask what gives you probable cause? It will come up at my arraignment and will in all likelihood be the grounds for my immediate release."

"Well, I wouldn't really count on that, Ms. Wyatt," said Scarpelli nicely. "But I don't mind divulging it to you. You see, you told me you worked at a bank and had to be there in the morning. But cat burglars need their sleep as much as anyone else..."

Courtney Wyatt closed her eyes lightly. She knew now.

"Yes, your digital alarm clock, Ms. Courtney. I noted the set of its alarm when I walked to your bed. It was set for 2:30 a.m. A little bit early for banking business, wouldn't you say?"

Her words, when they were uttered, all ran downhill to oblivion. "I forgot to re-set it."

Scarpelli nodded. "Doesn't exactly fall under the category of improper search or seizure, does it, Ms. Wyatt?"

"If you're hungry, Ms. Wyatt, I got extra burgers," said Foley. "If you like hot sausage and parmesan."

But Courtney Wyatt was no longer speaking to either of them.

Shave

by D.J. PASS

Jack Sharp Tried to Take Good Care of His Wife. However,
What Sort of Care Was Penny Taking of Him?

THE FIRST THING Jack Sharp saw when he opened his eyes was a burst of white. A spot of early morning sunlight from the high bedroom window fell upon her platinum hair and set it afire with bursts of clean light. He closed his eyes and nuzzled the back of her neck. The hair smelled deliciously human. His mind pictured him eating it like cotton candy.

She moved sleepily at his touch. When his fingers stroked the smooth skin of her stomach, she turned over onto her back. Already beads of sweat were starting to form on her forehead.

"Penny." His finger drew a circle on her stomach.

She opened her eyes and squinted at the bright window. Her hand floated up to her brow and carefully wiped the sweat away. Penny looked at her fingers, frowned disapprovingly, and closed her eyes again.

"Forget it," she finally said. "Even if it wasn't so damn hot."

Jack took his hand away resignedly and rolled onto his back.

"I guess it's hard on you,"

Penny said. "But my mind is made up. I'll start sleeping on the sofa tonight."

"This is stupid," Jack told her. "We've had problems before."

"And I'm sick of problems."

The ringing phone squelched Jack's reply. He answered with a short monosyllable after the first ring.

"Roberts here," the phone said. "Sorry to call so early, but I thought you should know. Sergeant Thoman was killed last night."

"Thoman?" Jack asked incredulously. "How did it happen?"

"I just got the facts so far. He was off duty, sitting in his car in the parking lot of an all-night grocery, downtown near Thirteenth."

"You think he stumbled onto a stick-up?"

"Not unless our local stick-up artists have started using 30-06's," Roberts replied wearily. "The wound indicates a high-powered hunting rifle at relatively close range. Less than a hundred

feet. Plus, as I said, he was sitting in his car, out of uniform."

"Sounds bad. Either we've got a random sniper —"

"Or it was murder all the way," Roberts said pensively. "But who would want to kill Thoman?"

"Who's been arrested in the last twenty years? Yeah, it's nasty either way."

"Cases like this make me glad we're still in the patrol car," Roberts grunted. "But the reason I called —"

"Yeah, I know. As head of the union's welfare committee, I get to console the widow. What a job."

Jack Sharp was still thinking about Thoman when he sat down to brunch. Who would want to kill him?

Who wouldn't? Riley Thoman was an anachronism, an ignorant racist who went by the book because he didn't have enough imagination to do it any other way. He was the kind of cop who held the department back, and Jack himself had often wished to be rid of him. It wasn't the loss of Riley Thoman himself that bothered Jack. It was the idea of a man with a rifle who didn't like cops . . .

"I thought you'd sleep late today, since you don't go on duty till four," Penny said.

"I have to go see Thoman's widow this afternoon."

"Yeah. But there is something we have to talk about. I saw a law-

yer yesterday." Jack glared at her but said nothing. "It doesn't matter if you cooperate or not, he said there would be no problem getting a divorce. The only difference is that it's going to cost you more if you contest it."

"Cost me more?"

"I am entirely dependent on you, darling," Penny said, acid dripping from her words. "I don't have any money of my own."

"I see," Jack said with equal cold venom. "I support you for three years while you sit around watching soap operas—"

"I tried to find a job," Penny snapped. "But you robbed the cradle, dear. You married me before I learned to support myself. Jack—" She let her voice soften. "Why do you want to stay married? We fight all the time. I'm always sitting home alone. I could count the nights we spent together last winter on my fingers. If you weren't on duty, you were gone to lobby with the legislature."

Jack threw down his fork.

"What I was doing was important."

"I'm sure. You spent more time working for the union than you did with me," Penny said, the edge back in her voice. "Well, since you like working so much, you won't mind getting a second job after we're divorced. You'll need it to pay the alimony."

Jack reached across the table and grabbed the front of Penny's

robe and jerked her against the edge of the table.

"If you divorce me," he said, trying to keep his voice even, "and if you get alimony, I'll quit my job and go on welfare before I pay you a cent!"

"Go ahead." Penny snarled through her bared teeth. "Hit me. The bruises will help me in court."

Jack pushed her back in her chair and finished his breakfast without tasting anything but bile.

THE THOMAN house was properly quiet. The ponderous ticking of a mantle clock was the only sound cutting through the thick silence in the dark, 1930-style parlor.

"Thank you, Mr. Sharp," Sergeant Thoman's widow said when he had offered the standard condolences. She was calm, almost preoccupied. Hysteria or shock was the usual reaction Jack had encountered in this kind of situation.

But, Jack reasoned, Alice Thoman had probably spent many an uncomfortable hour anticipating that phone call from the commissioner. Now it had come and she was alone. No friends or neighbors were there to console her. But Riley Thoman wasn't a man who made friends.

"He was a fine policeman," Jack lied. "We'll miss him too."

Mrs. Thoman sighed, a sigh that floated easily in the heavy air.

"I'm all alone now. Riley and I never had any children. I guess you knew that."

"Yes," Jack finally said, mostly for the sake of filling the dreadful silence.

"In a way, I suppose, that makes it easier," she continued. "But if we had children, they'd be grown now. Riley and I had been married for twenty-four years. I was only sixteen when he married me, and he was twenty-five."

She was no longer talking to Jack Sharp any more than she was talking to herself. She was simply talking, giving the facts for the record. Twenty-four years of marriage to Riley Thoman must have taught her to talk like that, Jack thought. Alice Thoman at forty was still attractive, but her soul was badly weathered.

The parlor was getting too oppressive for him to stay any longer. He didn't like leaving Mrs. Thoman alone in the quiet house, but Jack didn't think he could stand to share the awkward silence with her any longer.

"If there's anything I can do for you . . ." he reiterated as he stood to go. "Please get in touch with me."

"Of course. Thank you. But I think everything has been taken care of."

"I see. Well, I'll be going now."

Alice Thoman nodded but didn't get up. Jack let himself out into

the hot afternoon.

The funeral was a dreary affair. It was scheduled for two the following afternoon, the hottest, muggiest day of the summer. Jack and Roberts were pallbearers along with four other men who hadn't liked Thoman very much, but carried him in embarrassed discomfort. Everyone was relieved when it was over and the widow had been driven away.

"Heard anything?" Roberts asked as they drove away from the cemetery.

"Not a damn thing. Homicide is really playing this close to the vest. All I know is that they've decided it wasn't a sniper. There haven't been any other killings."

"Which leaves revenge." Roberts shrugged. "Lots of guys were busted by Thoman. But his wife won't have to worry, thanks to you."

"Not just me," Jack protested.

"Mostly you," his partner insisted. "I'm serious about that. The legislature never would have passed that police death benefit bill if you hadn't been there right along, prodding them. I feel better, a lot better, just knowing that, if anything happens to me, my family will get that fifty gees. And every cop in the state feels that same way."

"There were a lot of people working on it, not just me."

"But you were the driving force behind it. The bill never would

have gotten off the ground without you. With that fifty thou plus the standard department life insurance and my own policy, Mary and the kids would be in good shape if anything happened to me."

"Don't get careless," Jack laughed. "They might miss you if you got yourself killed."

"And you deserve the service award from the Patrolmen's League."

"I could live without that award."

"Well, when they present it to you — next Thursday, is it? — you need to get a better shave. You'll want to look pretty."

"What's wrong?" Jack asked the as he turned the mirror to inspect his face. "Oh yeah." There was an unshaven strip under his jaw.

"Looks like a misplaced moustache."

"My shaver started cutting out this morning," Jack explained. "I had to finish with Penny's razor. Hey, you'd better step on it or we'll miss roll call."

"*CHRIST!*" Jack shouted when the current hit him.

He flung the shaver down and leaned against the bathroom wall while his lungs fought to breathe again. The whole house was strangely quiet for a few seconds before he heard Penny's slippers running from the kitchen.

"*Jack!* What's wrong?"

Penny stood at the door, her face as colorless as her platinum hair. "What happened?"

"Damn thing shocked me," he muttered, picking up the shaver. "What the hell is *this*? These wires have been run together. I must have been touching this bare spot when I plugged it in."

Jack looked into Penny's vacant green eyes. "Have you been playing with this thing?"

"I wasn't playing with it," she replied coldly. "I was looking at it yesterday and found a broken wire and tried to fix it."

"Well for God's sake, don't try to fix anything else! Damn this thing's shot now. I'll have to use your razor again."

Penny sulked back to the kitchen to fix lunch. Hers was one of those hand-shaped women's razors and Jack had to struggle to control it with his trembling hand. He regarded his face in the mirror as he slipped on his uniform. It was a bad job, but it would have to do. If he tried again he might cut his throat.

"From now on," he told Penny when he sat down at the kitchen table, "either let me fix things or else take them to someone who knows what they're doing, okay?"

"I was only trying to save money," Penny began. The ringing of the phone cut her protest short.

Jack answered it. All Penny could hear of the conversation

was, "When?" and, "How?"

"Well?" she asked when Jack hung up.

"I'm going on in," he told her. "They got the guy who killed Thoman."

"Who is it?" Jack asked Krauss, the sergeant on the desk.

"Some punk kid named Walker," Krauss told him. "They got him back in an interrogation room now."

The station was buzzing. Everyone was talking about Walker, speculating why he had killed Thoman, praying for the return of the electric chair. The small observation room next to the interrogation room was crowded with cops watching Walker through the phony mirror.

The suspect appeared to be in his mid-twenties, long haired and unshaven. He was nondescript except for his sullen sneer, the sneer of the street punk. He turned a bored face to a corner of the ceiling as Lieutenant Lewis droned on in a monotone. That was just for the sake of form — Walker obviously wasn't going to answer any questions.

"For Christ's sake, *shut up!*" he finally told Lewis. "I told you I'm not saying anything till my lawyer gets here."

"We've got you dead to rights, Walker," Lewis told him. "There's no way you're going to beat this one. Might as well make a statement."

"There ought to be a medal

for killing pigs.”

Lewis began asking questions again, as blandly as before, and Walker's eyes returned to the ceiling.

Jack felt a nudge on his arm and turned to see Roberts standing beside him. His partner motioned toward the corridor and Jack followed him out.

“What do you make of him?” Roberts asked.

“Nothing. I don't think Lewis does either.”

“I wonder if they've got — hey! Lieutenant Evans!” Roberts called as the greying homicide detective started to enter the interrogation room. “What's the story on this turkey Walker? How'd you find him?”

“Easy,” Evans replied.

“Couldn't have taken more than two days of every detective on the force doing leg work. Plus the fact that this Walker ain't any too smart. The way we see it, he parked on the Fourteenth Street side of Memorial Park, climbed the gate, got up in a tree across Thirteenth from where Thoman was sitting and nailed him.”

“He got Thoman there somehow?”

“Presumably,” Evans nodded. “It was a set-up from the word go. Where Walker went wrong was not noticing that a couple of kids had snuck over the fence, too, and they were shaking the shrubbery near the gate. They say they didn't hear the shot, but they

saw Walker coming and going, and they saw him put a rifle in the trunk of his car.

“They gave us a description of him and the car. We checked, found the place he bought the ammo and piced him up in a pool parlor this morning.” Evans shook his head. “Took us two days to bring him in. God help us if we ever come up against a clever killer.”

“Got a motive?” Jack asked.

“Not yet. We just sent some boys out to go over his apartment. With any luck they'll find the rifle. Check back on your dinner break. I don't think this guy is going to last too long once his lawyer talks to him. He hasn't got much choice but to talk.”

THE SHIFT dragged by painfully. The unabated heat of the afternoon was made worse by Roberts' continual cursing of Daylight Savings Time, the weather and traffic. But Jack knew the thing that was really wearing on both their nerves was the anxiety — and the dread — about learning why Thoman had been killed.

“You got a worse shave today than yesterday,” Roberts finally grunted.

“Remind me to laugh when I'm off duty,” Jack said, forcing a smile. “I had to kill my shaver today in self-defense. Need to pick up a new one at a drug store tonight.”

“Huh! Look, it's almost eight.”

"Yeah, let's head back to the station."

The excited buzz of the station had been replaced by an uneasy silence when Jack and Roberts returned.

"What did they find at Walker's place?" Roberts asked Krauss when they entered.

"The weapon," Krauss said. "A 30.06 rifle. It had the owner's Social Security number on it. Walker must have been too smug or too stupid to file it off or get rid of the rifle."

"Who was the owner?"

"Riley Thoman."

Jack and Roberts looked at each other.

"Thoman's rifle?" Jack finally said. "Have they got a motive yet?"

"Yeah," Krauss said with disgust. "They got a motive."

There was a knot of people coming down the corridor from an interrogation room. Krauss looked up at them and frowned.

"Here comes your motive now."

Lewis was holding one of Alice Thoman's arms and Evans the other.

"Just like I thought," Evans said when they reached the desk. "Walker sang like a nightingale. Not that it was necessary. We showed his picture around Thoman's neighborhood. Everybody knew him as the guy who came around when Thoman left for work. You ought to be ashamed

of yourself, Alice. You're old enough to be his mother."

Alice Thoman tried to spit on Evans, but her mouth was dry.

"If I'd been his mother I wouldn't have raised him to be so stupid," she hissed. "At least I got the last laugh on Riley. He was scared to death of being buried, couldn't stand the thought of it. He wanted to be cremated." She gave an inhuman laugh. "Let the worms have him — they'll probably get ptomaine!"

"You had him killed so you could run off with your boyfriend?" Jack said. "*Christ!*"

"*Hell!*" Alice snapped. "We would have lived in style, thanks to you. You and that fifty thousand you finagled. Riley wasn't worth killing before."

"Come on Alice," Lewis said quietly. "They've got your room ready at the stockade."

They left Jack, Roberts and Krauss standing in uneasy silence.

"You guys better get back on the street," Krauss finally said.

"Yeah, let's go," Roberts said, avoiding Jack's eyes. "You wanted to pick up a new shaver."

"Think I'll try a safety razor," Jack said as they walked out of the station into the last light of the summer sun. It was still hot, but he didn't feel it.

"Ed," he said to his partner, "do you know a lawyer?"

"Sure, lots of them."

"Do you know one who handles divorces?"

The Hunting Season

by LEE SOMERVILLE



Sometimes, even in Season, Illegal Kills Occur

WHEN I FIRST decided to kill Tom June, I wasn't sure how I'd do it. I didn't really want to kill him, but Old Man Myrtu had made it plain that Tom June had the supervisor's job as long as he lived.

As long as he lived. That meant I'd never be promoted until Tom was dead. Tom was in his middle sixties. Left to his own devices, he'd live to be a hundred and still booze and chase women fifty-one weeks of every year. That fifty-second week would be spent at my hunting cabin in Caton County, Texas, drinking, playing cards, and hunting deer.

I thought about killing Tom during deer season, but I wasn't sure I could get by with it.

Yeah, I know. In Northeast Texas, just as all across the United States, deer hunting season is murder season. There are hun-

dreds of "hunting accidents" every year in these United States.

If you want to kill a business associate, a lecher, a good buddy or just a plain stranger, you buy a hunting license and take him with you into the woods."

But I worried about getting caught. In all the murder stories I read, there were accidental witnesses and other complications. I wanted to kill Tom and be free of suspicion.

Everything went wrong with the first part of deer season that November. We had planned to be in my cabin the day before the season started. There would be the usual four of us — Tom June, me, Joe Ranik, and Jess Newby. I was assistant supervisor at our Dallas branch of Myrtu Company. Joe and Jess worked for me.

We were delayed by business, and it was mid-afternoon of the

first day of hunting season before we reached Caton County. We turned onto the narrow dirt road leading to my woods, and found the road blocked with cars and trucks and people.

I stopped, and old man Zenophon Adams told me a city fellow had shot himself in the woods.

The victim was a short, fat middle-aged little man who should have stayed out of those woods. A green fly buzzed at dried blood on the shattered skull and gray hair. I looked at the gray sky of November, at the scarlet red of sweetgum leaves, at the tapestry of gold, red and brown leaves on the forest floor where the corpse lay.

"Hunting accident," Justice of the Peace Lute Eubanks intoned. He looked around as if for applause, satisfied with his own wisdom. "Hunting accident. City fellows come into these woods, carrying guns, and they don't know cow dung from wild honey."

When I looked at the dead man, I wanted to vomit. Then I made myself look again, look at his old-type double-barrel shotgun lying an arm's length from his body.

"Way I figure —" Lute Eubanks puckered thick lips and squirted brown tobacco juice, expertly catching the green fly on the wing. "Way I figure, this city fellow starts down the tree from his platform stand up yonder

in those branches. He's carrying his shotgun, and he slips. Double O buckshot catches him in the face, and *boom!* he ain't got no face left."

Lute never got past the fourth grade at Tuggle Springs school, but he had lots of kinfolk in Caton County. Now that he was too old for manual labor at the sawmill, kinfolk and friends had elected him Justice of the Peace. Gave him something to do.

"Hunting accident," he pronounced his verdict.

Yeah.

I knew damned well he had formed his opinion before he ever left his domino game at the general store. The Caton County sheriff had sent a deputy to investigate, but that lad couldn't track elephants in a four-inch snow. The deputy had his job because his dad controlled lots of votes. It got the kid out of his dad's store in Caton and let the little squirt ride a county car over the countryside, driving too fast and holler-ing ten-four. Right now the little bastard was strutting around like a gamecock during mating season, gun on hip, trying to impress Mary Susanna Bagley.

"Let's go, Pete." Tom June beckoned me. For a tough old guy, Tom looked queasy around the gills. "Hell, let's go to your cabin and have a drink."

Jess Newby agreed.

Joe Ranik's face twisted in a cold, cynical smile. "We've got

lots of hunting to do!" he snapped. "What are we? A group of old ladies? You guys make me sick!"

"I'll hunt after I have a good, stiff drink," Tom June promised.

I looked at the corpse on the ground, and I could visualize Tom's body as it would look when I killed him. Okay, I told myself. It'll be easy. But we can't have two similar accidents in a week. Somebody might get suspicious. I can wait until next year to kill Tom.

As soon as we reached the cabin, Joe Ranik downed a quick bourbon and then headed into the woods. Joe was cold and sarcastic, but he didn't give a damn about anyone except himself. The only reason he held his job was that he was a distant cousin of Old Man Myrtu's wife. I didn't like the bastard.

Tom cradled his drink with both hands. "That guy back in the woods," he said finally. "Coming down from his deer stand, his gun loaded. Shakes you, doesn't?"

"Anything shakes me," Jess Newby agreed. Jess was a salesman, was next to me on the promotion ladder. Probably he would never be boss of our Dallas branch, though. Back in 1952, Jess had run for one glorious touchdown in high school football. That had been twenty-five years ago.

Tom sipped his whiskey. "Life

is uncertain."

Jess held his glass high. "Toast to the three of us!" he proclaimed. "To long life and to success!" His voice was a bit too high.

He reached for the bottle, poured himself another slug, downed it straight. "Past mid-afternoon. What say we go to our stands and get a trophy deer?"

"All right." Tom got up, stretched his long legs. "Yeah, we came here to hunt. We'd better walk to our stands, breathe fresh air and make sure we're steady before we load our guns."

I watched as he put green-jacketed shotgun shells in his hunting bag. I knew that brand of ammo. Before next year, I'd have shotgun shells just like them. Next year, instead of using a rifle, I'd use an old-fashioned shotgun just like Tom always used.

Tom saw me watching him. "Hell, Pete, I dunno why you use a rifle. In these woods, a shotgun is all you need."

"Right," I agreed. Yeah, everything would work out okay. I knew Tom always unloaded his shotgun before climbing down from his stand. He always put the ammo in his coat pocket. Fine. I'd have matching ammo in my own coat pocket.

We did our hunting from platform stands in trees. Each stand was some distance from the others and positioned so there was no contact from early morn-

ing until the appointed time when I would come through the woods in my old, noisy farm Jeep. Sure, each man could walk to his stand from my cabin if he wanted to, but usually we left the cabin long before daylight. I'd stay at the stand until eleven, then climb down from my tree and honk that Jeep horn three times to make sure the others knew I was coming. I'd drive through the woods and pick each man up, one at a time, then take them to the lunch counter at the Tuggle Springs store. In the afternoon, we'd repeat the procedure.

Actually, we didn't climb trees. Each stand had boards nailed to tree trunks, ladder style. The stands were platforms among stout limbs, twenty or more feet from the forest floor. You went up that tree just like going up a ladder. On the platform, you could sit still or you could lie down and wait for a deer to pass below you. At that altitude, you didn't have to sit motionless. You couldn't smoke because of the smell of tobacco, but you could drink coffee from a thermos. If you were halfway still, the deer on the ground below would never know you were there.

Whenever I came to pick up Tom, he always unloaded his gun and put the shells in his pocket. When he'd be halfway down the tree, he'd toss that old shotgun to me.

Next year, I planned, I'd arrange to pick him up early. I'd have to do it without the Jeep, would have to do it privately so the others would not know I was there. I'd get him down from that tree somehow. When he tossed that shotgun to me, I'd take ammo from my own pocket, pop two Double O buckshot cartridges in that old blunderbuss, and blast Tom's head off his neck. Lute Eubanks would call it a hunting accident, and I'd be supervisor of the Dallas branch.

We went to our deer stands. No one saw a deer. Jess and Joe never fired a shot. A group of armadillos came rooting around Tom's tree, and he made mincemeat of two of them. I guess he'd had too much to drink.

"Oh, this is the life for me!" Tom said on our last night in the cabin. "Pete, Old Buddy, I can hardly wait for deer season next year."

"Neither can I."

All that winter, on dreary days in Dallas, Tom planned the next hunt. We came to Caton County on several weekends. We sat in front of the fireplace, warming ourselves and drinking toddies. We'd walk the woods, find deer trails.

Hickory leaves turned golden yellow. Sweetgum leaves flushed scarlet. My East Texas woodland was a crazy quilt of color—browns, reds, gold, some purple tint of hardwoods in the creek area, all that mixed with bright green of

pinetrees on sandy knolls.

We came a day early, though Tom kept saying he expected an important phone call from Old Man Myrtu. No phone in the cabin so we arranged for the Tuggle Springs store to take the call.

I lay awake half the night, planning how I'd kill Tom.

At four in the morning, I rolled out of my cot. It was cold, really cold for this part of Texas. I made a fire in the iron stove. I cooked pancakes, sausage and eggs to go with perked coffee. We couldn't shoot deer until six-thirty, barely daylight, but we'd be in the woods long before six.

Tom ate pancakes, one after another. He drank hot coffee, happy until his lean face wrinkled and he leaned forward, worried. "Pete, suppose Myrtu calls and nobody comes to tell us?"

"Jim Tuggle knows where my stand is, Tom."

"Maybe I'd better stay here at the cabin. Or spend the morning at the store. This call is important."

"Look, Tom, I'll stay here."

"I can't ask you to do that, Pete."

"I'm volunteering." I had to get him on his deer stand so I could kill him.

"No, I'll stay here. I can't miss that phone call."

"Tom, I don't feel good. I drank too much last night, or something. Didn't sleep. I'm a bit nauseated. I'll stay here at the

cabin, and if Jim Tuggle gets that phone call, I'll come after you. Okay?"

"Okay, Pete, maybe. You take Jess and Joe, put them in their stands, and come back and we'll talk."

I knew darned well I was going to get him in the woods, because this was the day I was going to kill him. I'd been assistant supervisor for four years now. With Tom dead, I could finally get that promotion to supervisor.

I took Joe and Jess to their deer stands on the far end of the place, about three-quarters of a mile from the cabin. When I came back in that noisy old Jeep, Tom was still at the table, still drinking coffee.

"Tom, how would you like my stand in the linden tree?"

"You mean it, Pete?"

"Sure. I don't feel like hunting."

Tom's lean face wrinkled in a big grin. I had the stand nearest the house. It was a good stand, my favorite, in a big old linden tree overlooking Pine Creek. Tom had been wanting to hunt from that linden tree from the first time he saw my place.

"If Old Man Myrtu phones, I'll come after you as soon as Jim brings the message." I promised.

"Don't get rattled and shoot me, thinking I'm a deer."

"Deer don't drive Jeeps. You're a hell of a good guy, Pete."

"I'll take you to the stand now."

"No, I'll walk. When Myrtu phones and says he's made his decision, come get me so I can phone him back. It's important."

He left, long legs swinging, his tall figure fading in early morning dark.

Or course I was not sick at my stomach. I'd never felt better. Things were shaping up real good.

At six-thirty-five, still dawn dark on a cloudy day, I heard Tom's shotgun go *ka-bloom!* down at that linden tree. I ran outside the cabin, listened for more sound. If he had killed a deer, he'd yell for me to bring the Jeep. No more sound. Silence.

Maybe Old Tom had shot and missed. Probably hadn't had time to climb to his stand. Probably a bobcat or an armadillo had been hear the base of the tree, and Tom couldn't resist the urge to shoot.

I fidgeted, unable to be still. Okay, I told myself, why not get it done early?

I put on my heavy coat, pulled the jacket hood over my head as protection against the cold. I checked my pockets. Yeah, I had two green-jacketed cartridges, .12 gauge, Double O buckshot, same ammo Tom used. When he handed me his unloaded gun as he came down the tree, I'd blow his face off.

I walked the trail quietly.

"Tom?" I called as I neared the tree. Called it just loud enough for him to hear.

Tree branches stood against

light gray sky, but ground level was still misty dark, sort of half-light.

"Tom?"

Something rustled the brush across the creek. I looked, and not more than two paces in front of me, at the foot of the linden tree, Tom's long body sprawled, arms flung wide, legs everywhere.

His face, partly covered by the hood of his jacket, was a mish-mash of blood and bone.

He was dead.

It was unreal. This was what I had planned, but it was done, and I hadn't done it.

Something stirred in the brush. Something ran, stumbled, crashed away until sounds died in the distance. I never saw what it was. It hadn't rained in three months, and there would be no tracks.

I stood dazed. After a while, I felt in Tom's coat pocket. Yeah, he had unloaded his gun. Two green-jacketed shells in his pocket.

I unbreeched his shotgun, careful to put on gloves first so I wouldn't leave prints. There were two red-jacketed shells in that gun, and one had been fired.

Tom wouldn't have given his gun to anyone except someone he knew and trusted. It had to be either Joe Ranik or Jess Newby. How had it been done? Was the killer waiting at this linden tree when Tom walked to it?

And then another thought. This was not Tom's stand. This was my stand. Neither Jess nor Joe knew

Tom would be there instead of me. It had been half-dark when he was shot. He and I were the same size. Same long, lean build. Both of us wore bright jackets with hoods that covered most of the face.

But neither Jess or Joe had reason to kill me. Or did they? What was so important about the phone call that might come any minute? Were the books being audited while the four of us were away from Dallas? What was going on? Had one of the two killed Tom just so the promotion ladder could be unclogged?

I almost ran back to the cabin. I waited an hour before I started the noisy old Jeep, honked three times, then "found" the body.

I knew I should tell the sheriff what I knew, but I wasn't going to. It might be hard to explain my own actions.

"Hunting accident," Justice of the Peace Lute Eubanks intoned again. Yeah, it was a rerun of last year, except that this time Tom's body lay sprawled under a tree. "Hunting accident. City fellows come into these woods, carrying guns, and they don't know cow dung from wild honey."

I had already been verbally promoted to supervisor. Before the inquest started, while I was at the store, Old Man Myrtu had called, asking for Tom. I'd taken the message, told him the news. Then he told me something. Tom had wanted to retire. Wanted to spend his time hunting and

fishing. Wanted me promoted to supervisor. The old man had finally agreed.

"Hunting accident," Justice of the Peace Eubanks repeated.

I'd have to work every day with Jess and Joe, not knowing which was the murderer, not knowing whether the killer meant to kill me and took Tom by mistake. Or maybe on impulse, or to cover up a bungled attempt.

Hunting accident. Hundreds of "hunting accidents" every year across these United States. If you want to kill a business associate, a lecher, a good buddy or just an ordinary stranger, you buy a hunting license and head into the woods. If you hunt in Caton County, Texas, in that odd part of Texas next to Arkansas, Louisiana and southeastern Oklahoma, you can really get by with murder.

But I'd have to work every day, almost fifty-one weeks a year, in Dallas with Jess and Joe. And in a big city, there are thousands of industrial accidents every year. If you can't kill a supervisor in an industrial accident, you can get him with a car or truck on a dark street on a rainy night.

I could be killed darned easy.

I looked at gray sky of November. I looked at gold and pink linden leaves. I looked at the crazy quilt pattern of leaves on the forest floor, at Tom's corpse with its skull blown to bloody bits. And despite the chill of November, I broke out in a heavy sweat.

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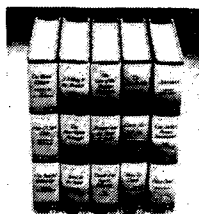
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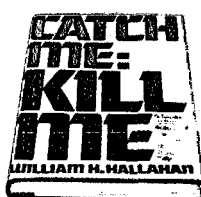
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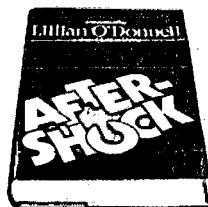
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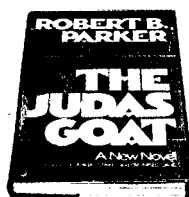
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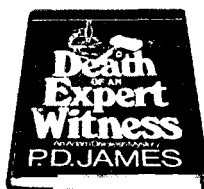
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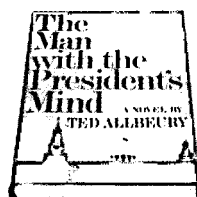
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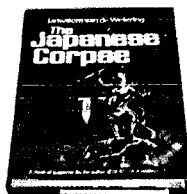
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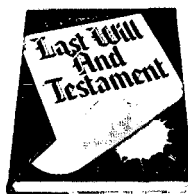
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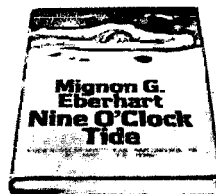
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